FAMILY DOOM

MRS. SOUTHWORTH

THE FAMILY DOOM

The Sequel of which is
"THE MAIDEN WIDOW."

BY

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of "Self-Raised," "Ishmael," "Retribution," "The Bridal Eve,"
"The Deserted Wife," "Eudora," "The Haunted Homestead,"
"The Bride's Fate," "Victor's Triumph,"
"The Wife's Victory," etc.

CHICAGO
M. A. DONOHUE & Co.

Rare
FS
2892
.F35
1900z

THE FAMILY DOOM.

CHAPTER I.

AGAINST WIND AND WAVE.

All day with fruitless strife they toiled;
With eve the ebbing current boiled
More fierce from strait and lake;
And midway through the channel met
Conflicting tides that foam and fret,
And high their mingled billows jet,
As spears that, in the battle set,
Spring upward as they break.
Then, too, the lights of eve were past,
And louder sang the western blast
On rocks so gray and hoar;
Rent was the sail and strained the mast,
And many a leak was gaining fast,
And the pale steersman stood aghast
And gave the conflict o'er.—SCOTT.

It was near the close of a cold December day, a few years since, that the little coasting clipper *Carrier*, Captain Tom Storms, master, was cleaving its course through wave and weather down along the western shore of Chesapeake Bay.

The *Carrier* was a tidy little brigantine, owned by her captain, and doing a brisk little independent business of her own in a circumscribed space; trading between the rich plantations along the Chesapeake and its tributaries and their nearest city markets—Alexandria, Georgetown and Washington, or Baltimore or Annapolis.

She was now returning from Baltimore, where she had lately delivered a cargo of tobacco, Indian corn and wheat, and she was bringing back a miscellaneous assortment of dry goods, groceries, hardware and so forth,

consigned to country tradesmen along the coasts, or to wealthy householders who bought their provisions by wholesale from the city merchants.

All this merchandise was safely stowed away in the hold. The deck was clean and clear of all encumbrances except coiled ropes, folded sails and other necessary rigging, neatly put up.

The *Carrier* had also a clean little cabin, which did double duty as dining-room and dormitory. Its center was occupied by a good-sized round table, and its sides by sleeping berths—three on each hand. At one end was the stairs that led up to the deck, and at the other end the buffet in which the captain kept his choice liquors.

This cabin could accommodate, besides the captain and his mate, four passengers, and Captain Tom Storms took all the passengers he could possibly procure; and not so much for the profit of their coins as for the pleasure of their company; for the merry master of the *Carrier* was of an exceedingly social turn; and would have taken up with "trumpery," having no better company.

Now, however, on this blustering winter afternoon, there was but one passenger belonging to the cabin, and he was on deck.

He stood aft, leaning carelessly against the taffrail, gazing forward down the bay, and exchanging an occasional word with the helmsman.

He was a young man of about twenty-five years of age, yet he had the look of one who had lived much longer than that. He was of the medium height; of slender, elegant and graceful figure; but without the slightest fault of effeminacy. His features were of perfect beauty. The high, proud forehead, the straight, fine nose, the short, curved upper lip, the well-turned chin and stately throat, could only have been equaled by some poet-sculptor's ideal of the young Apollo. This fine face was darkly bronzed as by long exposure to a torrid sun, and deeply shaded by masses of jet-black, curling hair, that drooped about his temples and neck, long, soft and shining as the ringlets of a girl. But the most remarkable and most attractive feature were a pair of large, dark, most mournful eyes, whose wistful gaze would have haunted you long, had you ever happened to meet it.

He drew a small telescope from his pocket, adjusted it and raised it to his eye. He looked long and wistfully at a distant point, and then, lowering his glass, turned to the helmsman and inquired:

"What place is that?"

"That? Why, the mouth of Henniker's Creek. It looks mighty near now in that light, which throws things forward so; but, Lord bless your soul, it's miles and miles away yet; and I shouldn't wonder, if this 'ere head wind holds, as we don't make it to-night," said the man.

"'Henniker's Creek?' But I am speaking of that point which stretches so far out to sea."

"Ay! That's Henniker's Point. We have to round that to go up the creek—that is, when we do go there. We ain't agoing this time; we hain't no business there."

"There is a house—a very fine one, if I mistake not—in among the trees, a little back. I see its chimneys rising above their tops," said the stranger, with his glass again to his eye.

"Yes, sir; that's Widowwille."

"What an extraordinary name?"

"Well, sir, it is; and that's a fact."

"Who gave it that name?"

"Not its 'sponsors in baptism,' as the kittychism says; for, to tell the truth, I don't think as the old place ever was christened, or even Christianized. But, sir, you know as there is some places names themselves—like 'Bloody Run,' and 'Gallows Hill,' and such. Not to say as Widowwille hasn't another name as was given it. Henniker House is what it is called down in the dockerments."

"'Henniker House?' An old family property, perhaps. An old colonial estate, probably, dating back to the days of Baron Baltimore, and the earliest settlement of the country."

"'Pears so, sir. Leastwise, I've often heard my grandfather say so."

"You are from these parts?"

"Lord love you, yes, sir! I've been 'long o' the cap'n, man and boy, ship and shore, these fifty years."

"Then the captain is from this section?"

"In course he is, sir. He's got a plantation yonder

away, 'bout ten miles below Henniker. Leastways, the brothers have. Mr. Dickson Storms, he works it. The captain, he took to the sea, though he was the oldest brother. But, Lord love you, sir, every other man you meet along these shores is a seafaring man; and the rest are everlasting a hankering arter it."

"That is apt to be the case with a coast population," remarked the stranger.

At this moment the sun sank below the lowest layer of clouds, lighting up the long line of Henniker's Point, and throwing out every object into almost magical distinctness

"A splendid scene! What a picture for an artist!" said the stranger, with enthusiasm.

"It is a fine property, sir—a fine property, even now!" remarked the more practical mariner. "There's more'n two thousand acres on't. No better soil in lower Maryland Woods full of game, too, and waters full of fish."

"It is an old Maryland manor, no doubt—an old colonial manor, of which so few are remaining now in their integrity," said the stranger, meditatively. "Henniker's Creek—Henniker's Point—Henniker's House——"

"And Henniker's Hamlet, as well, sir," added the sailor.

"All Henniker's," smiled the stranger.

"Yes, sir; and not a Henniker left alive to claim a inch on it."

"No?"

"No, sir! And what's more, not a man alive as ever remembers to have seen a living Henniker, or even to have seen any one else who had seen one," said the sailor, mysteriously.

"Well, sir, they do say—— But I'd better hold my jaw, I reckon. Least said soonest mended."

"At any rate the manor has passed away from the Hennikers?"

"Ages ago, sir; more than a century ago, if all they tell is true."

"And it is now in the possession of——"

"The Widow Jernyngham—yes, sir."

"And that is the reason it is called Widowville?"

"Well, no, sir; not that exactly. There's a many place

might be called Widowwille—if being owned by a widow would make it sich."

"Then why——" began the stranger; but suddenly he remembered he was asking questions, and he paused.

"You want to know why it's called Widowwille? Why, now, if you knowed a house where there was three live widows, of three generations, like three steps, straight down from mother to darter and grandarter, wouldn't you think it was justifiable homicide to call the place Widowwille arter so many widows?"

"I should think it justifiable. But are there so many widows at Henniker?"

"Woman's Right's and Petticoat Government reigns there, sir, you may take my davy for it."

"Well?"

"Well, first there's old Madam Jernyngham as I told you on, mistress of the manor. She is aged seventy, and is as brisk as a bee, as busy as a beaver. Then there's her darter, Mistress Dering, the proudest woman in Maryland, aged fifty-four. Then there's her darter agin—Mrs. Brooke, a handsome woman of thirty-six. Them's the three widows as gives Widowwille its nickname. And then there, last of all, is 'Beauty.'"

"'Beauty?'"

"Yes, sir, 'Beauty,' Berenice, Miss Brooke, darter of Mrs. Brooke, grandarter of Mrs. Dering, and great-granddarter of old Mrs. Jernyngham, heiress in right of all her foremothers to Henniker, and heiress in right of all her forefathers, to no end of land and of niggers, and of houses on shore and ships at sea."

"Beauty and heiress—she is equally favored by nature and by fortune. Her's is a brilliant destiny," said the stranger.

"Ain't it, though, sir? Lor! some people have white bread cut thick and buttered on both sides like Berenice Brooke! And some have brown bread shaved thin, with no butter at all, like my darter Sukey—she who has neither good looks nor yet good money to carry her through the world. If I was to die to-morrow, she'd have to go out to service, so she would."

Here the voice of the captain was heard on deck.

"Take in the fores'il, there, boys! Look alive now! We're going to have the devil to pay here presently!"

Then, hurrying aft, he snatched the helm from the hand of the helmsman, exclaiming, as he turned it and altered the course of the vessel:

"What the —— are you about, Jack? Letting your tongue run before your wits, and the craft drive on to destruction? Don't you see that sandbar ahead? In five minutes you would have had her aground! Go forward and help them with that sail."

Crestfallen, the old sailor saluted his captain, and walked forward to obey orders.

With an anxious countenance, and with earnest attention, the captain held the helm in silence until he had steered the vessel clear of the impending danger.

Then, when they had left the sandbar far to leeward, and the captain was "taking it easy," the stranger who had felt somewhat guilty in allowing old Jack to bear all the blame, turned to apologize.

"I beg pardon! It was not the old man's fault—it was really mine, for talking to him——" he began.

But Captain Storms stopped him.

"Oh, no apologies! That old idiot never can do more than one thing at a time. For instance, he can't talk and steer at the same moment."

"Can any one?"

"Yes, I can, except when we are in danger. Then all my attention is required to mind the helm. You were talking of the young heiress of Henniker as I came up?"

"Yes; I was observing how brilliant was the destiny of a young lady so highly favored by nature and by fortune as to be both beauty and heiress at the same time."

"Yes, poor girl," sighed the captain.

"Poor girl!" exclaimed the stranger, opening his great black eyes in astonishment.

"Ah, yes, poor child! Poor child! Beauty and an heiress as she is, she might gladly change places with the plainest girl in Maryland!"

"But why? You amaze me! Is she not happy?"

"Happy? The young, I believe, dream of love and of marriage as their best earthly bliss. It is right, and it is natural that they should do so. Now, could you be

happy, if you knew that, blessed with beauty and with wealth, you were still forbidden all hope of love or of marriage, and doomed to wear out your life in solitude? Tell me that!"

"No, certainly I could not be happy under such a dreadful doom. But is this fate to be hers?" exclaimed the stranger, in a tone and with a look in which amazement, incredulity and curiosity were all expressed.

"Assuredly, it is her fate. She cannot marry, she ought not to marry, since marriage, for her, would be crime."

"But why? What ails the girl, that she must not marry?"

"Young man, I said just now that Berenice Brooke, beauty and heiress, might gladly change places with the plainest and poorest girl in Maryland. And now I tell you further, that I have a son, who is the last of his race; but I would rather that son should die unmarried, and my race should become extinct, than that he should marry the beautiful, amiable and accomplished young heiress of Henniker," said the captain, solemnly.

"There is some mystery?" queried the young man.

"I feel as if it was a sort of treason to the family to speak of these matters at all. I hardly know how I was led into doing it," said the captain.

"By your love of gossip, old friend," mentally interpolated the young man.

"Anyway," continued the captain, "you are a stranger who certainly never did, and probably never will, set foot on Henniker. But I would die before I would tell the story to any one who would be likely to go blabbing of it all over the neighborhood."

"There is nothing to be feared from me on that score."

"No, and so you shall hear the secret. Now, then, give me your utmost attention, for I must speak low. I would not for the world have any of the men overhear me," whispered Captain Storms.

The old skipper need not have given this charge.

The stranger was attending, with every faculty of his mind and body strained and on the alert. His handsome head was bent forward, his pale, eager face gleamed dimly forth from its shadowy falls of black hair, his

large, black eyes shone fiercely through the darkness, like those of a wild animal. He was listening with his whole soul upon the *qui vive*. Was it only a vulgar curiosity to hear the secrets of a strange family that absorbed him thus? I think not.

"As far back as I can remember, and how much farther back than that I cannot say from my own knowledge, the house of Henniker—— But Lord bless my soul and body! Here I am running afoul of that schooner in the dark! Doing the same sort of thing that I swore at poor old Jack for doing! So much for human justice and consistency," suddenly exclaimed the old captain, as he quickly shifted the position of the helm and gave his whole mind to steering.

The young man shrugged his shoulders and drew back with a look of disappointment and annoyance. He would rather have run into the schooner and taken his chance of destroying and being destroyed than have missed the solution of that mystery of fair women which he so much longed to understand. He sat watching the skipper until they had steered clear of the impending danger and left the schooner far to windward, and then he bent forward, eagerly, touched the arm of the captain and exclaimed:

"Well?"

"What?" demanded old Storms.

"The story! the story! the story!"

"Oh, blast the story! I can't attend to that now! We're in a very ugly part of the bay. There are shoals along this coast and I must take the ship through them as well as I can. Besides, the wind is rising again! Don't you hear it? I knew that was only a temporary lull at sunset? I was sure the devil would be to pay soon; and so it will. Listen to that! We shall have a gale before midnight. Ahoy, there! Take in all sail! And Jack Weatherby, come here and take the helm!" roared the captain, turning from his passenger to his crew.

And in another instant old Jack ran aft and seized the helm, which the skipper relinquished only to hurry forward to see his orders carried into effect.

And so energetic, not to say profane, were his appeals to heaven and earth and his consignments of every-

thing and everybody to the other place, that in a very few minutes all the sails were taken in and the brigantine put in complete trim to weather the impending storm if she could.

And not a moment too soon.

Never had a gale sprung up more suddenly. The sky grew even darker than the night had already made it. The waves were lashed into foam and kindled into phosphoric sparks. The wind roared and howled over the troubled waters and shrieked and whistled among the rattling shrouds. The ship, straining every timber and groaning like a living soul, struggled onward through the storm. The crew worked hard; but the captain swore harder.

"If we could only double Henniker's Point and run up into the mouth of the creek we might anchor; but the cursed lubbers can't do it!" swore old Storms, as he came aft to speak to the stranger, who still kept his place on deck.

"It is not so easy to double a point like that in stormy weather," replied the young man, taking the part of the rated crew.

"It is easy enough. It could be done if all the men were like me. I could do it, if I could project my spirit into each of the men. Blowed if it is not growing worse and worse! You'd better not stay up here on deck. You'd better go below and turn in, Mr.—Mr. —— There! You've been with me a whole week and never told me your name yet," said the skipper to his mysterious passenger.

Yes, and the stranger did not tell his name then; and what is more, he did not take the captain's advice any more than he took his hint. Instead of going below and turning in, he stayed above and turned about. He remained on deck during all the hours of that dreadful night, while the storm raged, the skipper swore, the crew toiled and the craft struggled with the heaving waves the howling winds!

All night long the terrible strife continued.

It was near morning when the worn-out crew succeeded in bringing their ship around to Henniker's Point.

But in the very act of doubling, the wind struck the

brigantine broadside, drove her furiously on to leeward and capsized her within a hundred yards of the shore!

The calamity came so suddenly and took captain, crew and passenger so utterly by surprise, that in an instant all hands found themselves in the water, blindly struggling for life among the whelming waves before they could understand what had happened, or realize where they were. Most fortunately there were no helpless women or children to be cared for and saved. Moreover, the men were good swimmers and they were within a few hundred feet of the land. It was still dark as Tophet, and instinct rather than light guided them in reaching the main. Each man struck out manfully, and in a few moments all safely reached the shore, clambered up the bank and sat down to recover their last breath and scattered wits.

The wind was still blowing a hurricane, and their dripping garments were soon frozen to their backs.

"We are on the banks of Henniker's Creek, near its mouth, and Henniker's house can't be far off," said the captain.

And at this the young unknown pricked up his ears, and listened.

"I say, captain, it is near on to mornin', I'm thinkin'. It is gettin' light over yonder," said old Jack.

"So it is. Day is dawning. And now we had all better try to find our way to the house, and rouse up the family. We shall be sure to have help and succor from them," said Captain Storms, rising.

"And to think, after all, here I am cast ashore upon the soil of Henniker, with no possible alternative but to seek the shelter of its fatal roof. It is destiny!" mused the young stranger; "and who can resist his destiny?"

CHAPTER II.

STORM-BOUND.

And now came winter clothed all in frieze,
Chattering his teeth for cold that did him chill,
Whilst on his hoary beard his breath did freeze.—SPENSER.

Pushing through the leafless copswood, crushing over the frozen stubble fields, in the early dawn of that winter morning, the shipwrecked party came in sight of Henniker House.

It was a large, rambling, old-fashioned edifice, irregularly built of dark bricks, and rising amid a grove of yew trees, old, weird and ghostly as the haunts of the Druids.

Keeping close to a low brick garden wall, overgrown with brambles, the captain led his party on toward the front entrance.

Here they were met by an onslaught of dogs. Dogs of all breeds, sizes and colors, from the great black Russian bloodhound to the tiny, curly white poodle, burst out upon the intruders, barking furiously.

The captain caught up a broken branch of a tree and made it play briskly among them, while he shouted:

"What now, Slayer? For shame, Watchman! Stop it, Sharp! Don't you know your friends from your foes, Lily White?"

At the sound of his voice in a moment all was changed. The dogs began to jump about him with quick, joyous barks, assuring him with all the inarticulate eloquence of their race that it was all a mistake, that they were very glad to see him, and very sorry, and begged ten thousand pardons.

"There, there, that will do! Down, Sentinel, old fellow! I knew you took us for sheep-stealers, Guardsman! Come, come, Brownie, let's get on to the house and see the ladies."

So, with caressing pats and gentle kicks, he cleared away the dogs and led his party through them to the foot of the long flight of stone steps, ascending from terrace to terrace, up to the front door.

Here they were met by an old negro man running down and shouting:

"What is it, good dogs? Sssss! Seize 'em! Seize 'em, Slayer!"

"Hallo, you Rip! Stop that! This is a pretty way to receive an old friend, cast away on your shores, too!" exclaimed the captain.

"Lor' bless my eyes, Marse Tom! Is that you, sir? And cast——"

"I? Of course it is! Capsized on your coast, too! You're a ruthless savage, you Rip! If I had been cast away on the coast of Congo, your countrymen, the Caffrees, would have treated me better. And you set the dogs on me! What good has civilization and Christianization done you, I wonder?"

"Lor', Marse Tom! Who'd a thought it was you at this unlawful hour of the morning? And capsized on the coast! And all the beasts barking, too, as if you was an enemy! 'Deed, Lor' knows, I did think as it was horse thieves. We been done robbed so often this season, sir! 'Deed we has! The rogues, they know as there's nobody but ladies and colored folks here, and they land in the night, so they do—the willains!—and carry off our pigs and poultry; and only week afore last they stole ole mistress' own riding-horse!"

"What? Frisky?"

"Yes, sure's you're born, sir! But, Lor'! that's not to be named alongside of your misfortune, sir! I hope no lives was lost?" said the negro, who had now reached the top of the stairs and opened the hall door.

"No, thank Heaven! How are the ladies?" inquired the captain, as they entered the house.

"Well as ever they can be, sir. Lor'! when was ever anything the matter with our ladies? Come in, sir. Here's a fire in the big room," said the old man.

And he opened a door on the right and ushered the shipwrecked party into a fine, old-fashioned room, with a lofty ceiling, high windows and wrought marble mantelpiece. A great fire of hickory logs, large enough to roast an ox, was roaring and blazing up the broad chimney.

"This is jolly! This is very fine! We can thaw out

here," said the captain, approaching the great blazing fire, and spreading his hands over it.

His example was followed by all his party, who came and stood basking and turning about in the genial glow of the hearth. Soon a great steam arose from all their thawing clothes.

And, moreover, the negro pushed through the crowd of men, and stirred up the logs with a great poker, and made the fire sparkle, blaze and war more fiercely than before, and the steam rise in greater clouds than ever.

"I say you, Rip! I don't want to disturb the ladies so early as this; but if, without troubling any of them, you could procure us something hot and strong, it might save our lives."

"'Cuba's making coffee, sir."

"Oh, coffee be blowed! I want some of the strongest brandy and the hottest water you can lay your hands on —if you can get it without 'waking the ladies."

"Lor' bless you, sir, our ladies is all awake. Ole mistress has been down this hour. And here she comes now. I hear her a-talking to Sofayeks," said the negro.

And at this môment fast footsteps were heard approaching, and a bisk voice saying:

"But, first of all, hurry down to the waterside, Sophocles, and seek the boats. I'm afraid some of them have been torn from their moorings by the gale last night. If so, come back immediately and tell me, for other boats must be sent out directly to look for them."

And the next instant the door opened, and Mrs. Jernyngham, or Madam Journey, as she was usually called, hurried into the room.

She was a small, thin, fair-complexioned old lady, neatly dressed in a gray merino gown, white neck-frill and white lace cap. She crossed the floor quickly.

"Bless me, what a vapor! Captain Storms—gracious me, captain, where did you come from? What has happened? Who are these with you?" she hurriedly inquired, as old Tom Storms emerged from the cloud of steam to meet her.

"I come from the sea, madam. Shipwreck has happened. And these are the companions of my misfor-

tune," answered the captain to all her questions, in the order in which they were asked.

"Shipwreck! Good Heaven, captain! I hope no lives were lost!" exclaimed the lady, in consternation.

"Not one. The wind blew us ashore, turned over the vessel, and emptied us out like a shoal of spoiled herrings."

"Thank Heaven for that, old friend."

"For my shipwreck? I'm obliged to you, ma'am."

"No; you know well enough what I mean—for the lives saved. But, now, the next point; I hope the brig was not a total loss?"

"No; I think not; she is capsized—that is all I know yet."

"And the cargo?"

"Oh, I suppose the cargo is damaged considerably. Still, I don't know yet. When the wind and the waves go down a little, we will go and look at her."

"Was she insured?"

"Oh, yes; the brig was, but not the cargo. How could it be? Owned by so many different people, and made up of so many different parcels?"

"Ah, to be sure. But, my dear captain, how wet you are! And your men, too! Let me send the men first to the kitchen fire to dry themselves; and let me provide you with a change of clothing?"

"Thank you, madam. And if you could order the poor fellows something strong and hot, it might do them good."

"And yourself, too, captain, eh? Quite right. It shall be done. Euripides, take these men down stairs, and tell Hecuba to see to their needs. Then light a fire in the gentleman's spare room, lay out the necessary clothing to air, and show the captain up there. And be quick, Euripides—just as quick as possible," said Madam Journey, briskly.

The old man bent his white head in obedience, and then signaled the sailors to follow him.

The men—some six or eight only in number—filed out after their leader, leaving the captain and his one passenger standing on the hearth.

The latter seemed to be in rather a false position—be-

ing neither the captain, nor one of the crew, nor invited to stay in the parlor with the first, nor to go to the kitchen with the last.

Apparently now, for the first time, their hostess noticed him. Probably previous to this moment she had not looked at him, or had classed him with the crew. Now, however, she fixed her surprised eyes on his dark, handsome face, and then turned to the captain and inquired:

"And your friend, this gentleman?"

"Oh! ay! yes! to be sure! a passenger of mine! Mr. —a—a—a, Mr.—a—a?" said the captain, turning appealingly to the individual in question.

There was no help for it. The stranger advanced, and bowing low before the lady, said:

"Vane Vandeleur, madam, at your orders."

The lady suddenly grew very pale, and sank down into the nearest chair.

The captain hurried toward her, exclaiming:

"You are faint, Mrs. Jernyngham! You are ill! What is it? What can I do for you? What shall I bring you?"

"Nothing. And you can do nothing—yes, you can open a window and let out some of this heavy steam," replied the lady, with an effort.

"To be sure! It was my half-drowned crew did it. They did smell like a flock of wet sheep, and that's a fact," said old Tom Storms, as he fumbled at the window sash some moments before he succeeded in raising it.

Then indeed the air rushed in, driving all the fog before it, and sending a blaze up the chimney that looked as if it might have burst the solid masonry.

And the lady arose and walked toward her younger guest, and said:

"You will pardon me, I hope, Mr. Vandeleur, but—the steam was very suffocating, and—I am not so young as I was twenty years ago. You are very welcome to my house. Will you sit near the fire?"

"I thank you, madam. I beg you will permit me to stand. I——"

"Certainly. Perhaps it is better that you should do so, rather than sit in wet clothes. Captain, will you shut

that window now? The room is cleared of steam, and that blast is as keen as if it blew directly from the ice-fields of the Arctic Circle."

Old Storms complied with her request, and then rejoined his companion on the rug before the fire.

"Gentlemen, my servants will wait on you, in a few moments, to show you to a room where you may exchange your wet garments for dry ones. It is now seven o'clock. Breakfast will be served at eight," said Mrs. Jernyngham. And with a slight inclination of her head, she left the room.

A singularly mournful smile just curved the lips of the young stranger as his dark eyes followed their hostess from the apartment.

Old Storms whistled.

Vandeleur turned toward him with a look of inquiry.

"Oh, you may stare!" said old Storms, defiantly.

"What did you mean by that whistle?" demanded the young man.

"What the demon do you mean yourself? And what did you do or say to the old madam to give her that dreadful turn?"

"I? Nothing! She said it was the steam. So did you, I think."

"Steam! Ha! ha! ha! Tell that to the marines! It takes something stronger than that to upset the old madam. The women of her race were never known to give way to any weakness of mind or body. No, nor she didn't give way this time, neither, though I never saw her so near doing so in my life! But only see how quickly and completely she recovered herself, and ascribed her attack to the harmless steam! It was something in you that upset her! Now, what was it? And who the devil are you, anyhow?"

Vandeleur shrugged his shoulders, and, laughing lightly, answered carelessly:

"I should not fancy being obliged to furnish the key to all your enigmas."

"Thank you! But here comes 'Euripides,' as his mistress christened him; 'You-Rip,' as I and everybody else call him."

"Cap'n, your room's ready, sir, if you'll come and go to it now," announced the old man, politely bowing.

"All right, Rip. Lead the way. Come, Mr. Vandeleur!" said old Storms, striding on, and beckoning his companion to follow.

"'Bandy-legs!' Ain't that a rum name for a young gentleman, neither! And his legs is as straight as mine too!" said old You-Rip to himself, gazing over his shoulder at the elegant form of the stranger, and then glancing down at his own curved lower extremities.

He led the way up a broad flight of stairs to a spacious bedroom in the gable end of the house, with a large double window looking out to sea.

The captain walked at once to this window to take a view.

The sun was just rising and shooting long arrows of light across the waters of the bay and up the creek, and their points struck and flashed back from some shining metallic objects on the beach below.

"Yes, there she is yet, Lord bless her!" he cried, rubbing his hands. "Not washed away, thank Heaven! though the winds and waves do thrash her cruelly. But now the sun is up the wind will go down, and the waves will soon follow their example, and then we'll see what can be done in righting her and securing the cargo, or what's left of it."

"I should think she would also want some repairs."

"Well, yes, I suppose she will. But we needn't go far for them. Lord bless you, sir; half the men about here are, of necessity, ship carpenters and sailmakers. If she isn't injured past remedy, we will have her all right in a little time."

"Please, gentlemen, it half arter seven, and breakfast will be on the table at eight, and the ladies, you see, sir——"

"Don't like to be kept waiting, I suppose," put in the captain.

"Well, sir, the ladies is very punktywell, especially ole mist'ess, who keeps everybody up to the mark, worse'n any field oberseer as ever you saw."

"Well, we'll not fall under her just rebuke. Come Vandeleur!—I am very glad to know you name at last,

so as to be able to call you something else besides 'you' and 'sir.' Come—let's put ourselves in trim for breakfasting with the ladies."

There were two washstands and a great plenty of clean towels and fresh water, all of which the weather-beaten men freely used.

Having well washed and combed themselves, they turned to the ample provision of clothing that hung airing before the fire.

"Good gracious, Rip! Do you expect us to put all these on our backs? Why, here are suits enough to fit out the whole crew for a long voyage," laughed the captain, as he put himself into one of the largest shirts in the collection.

"Well, marster, you see, sir, I thought it were better to hang out a variety for you and the tother gentleman to take your pick and choose from, 'cause you see, sir, what'll fit one gentleman mayn't fit another. Can I help you, sir?"

"No, thank you. I'm no stranger here. I can look out for myself. Do you attend this gentleman," said the captain, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Vandeleur.

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir," said the old man. And then, turning toward the stranger and bowing with all the polite alacrity of his race, he signified that he was at that gentleman's service.

Vandeleur acknowledged the courtesy by a slight smile and nod.

"Here, sir," said the old man, beginning to turn over the piles of clothing, "here are three sizes to choose from; and among 'em all I hope as you'll be suited."

"No doubt of it," laughed Vandeleur.

"This, sir," said the groom of the chambers, holding up a suit in the fashion of more than fifty years before—"this is werry large—werry large, indeed; miles too big for you, I should say, sir. It belonged to my eldest marster, sir—though he was a werry young marster when he died—Captain Journey, sir, of the United States Navy, killed in a sea fight in the year '90. Well I 'members of the day, sir, when the news 'rove. It was a wictory, sir. But what was a wictory to her who had lost her com-

panion? Old madam was a young beauty then, sir; and her onliest darter, her onliest child—Mrs. Dering, which now is, but Miss Hortensia Jernyngham as then was—was a little babby, sir. And the madam, cheerful as you sees her now, took her loss so to heart then, that she never married again, don't you see?"

"And now, Rip, suppose you stop to take breath, while you find Mr. Vandeleur something that he can wear, and hand that giant's suit of clothes over to me," said old Storms, impatiently.

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir!" replied Eurpidies, bowing with polite acquiescence, as he delivered the garment.

Then he turned again to the stranger, whose fixed and interested attention had greatly pleased and flattered him, and, taking up another suit, said:

"And this, sir, was the property of Colonel Dering, United States Army, sir; mortally wounded in a scrimmage with the Indians in the year '12, sir. Yes, sir! His wife, Miss Hortensia that was, had gone with him into the Indian country, sir. And the first we knew of his loss was Miss Hortensia 'pearing among us with widow's weeds on her back and an orphan infant in her arms. And she never tried it again. And to this day, she hasn't got over his loss."

"Your ladies have been visited with heavy trials," observed Vandeleur.

"You may say that, sir, for as cheerful ladies as they is, too. But will you try this suit on and see if it will fit you?"

"I am afraid it is too small. Let me see another."

"Well, he was a little fellow, was the colonel! and that's a fact! A werry little fellow; but, Lord! he had a soul as big as Alexander the Great, sir!"

"Alexander the Great was also a little fellow physically. And I myself am scarcely up to the regulation standard," said Vandeleur, with a smile at his own slight, but most graceful figure.

"Yes, sir; but then you makes up for it all in good looks. Lor', sir, there's very few young ladies handsome as you are."

"Many thanks for your good opinion," laughed Van-

deleur. "But now hand me that suit of clothes, which you hold in your hand. I think they may fit me."

"There, sir," said the old man, with a sigh, as he held up an elegant suit of black broadcloth; "these belonged to Mr. Raphael Brooke. Ah! sir! ah, sir! Talk of gentlemen being slain in battle! That's bad enough; but not as bad as his fate! His fate, sir, was enough to break your heart."

"You, Rip! You are babbling," exclaimed old Storms, angrily

"I know I am, sir; but I can't help of it! 'Deed I can't. These clothes they bring up old times. And when I think of Marse Rafe—I—I——"

Here the old man broke down, rubbed his sleeve across his eyes and sobbed.

"What was the fate of this beloved young master?" inquired Vandeleur, with deep interest.

"Well, sir; you see he married Miss Rosamond, which they do say means Rose of the World—— Do they fit you?" inquired old Rip, breaking off from his scarcely commenced narrative to ask the question.

"Yes; they fit to a nicety," answered Vandeleur, as he cased himself in the elegant suit of clerical black. "But proceed with what you were about to tell me."

"Well, sir, he married our Miss Rosamond—our Rose of the World—she that her mother brought home from the Indian country after the death of her father, Colonel Dering, you know——"

"Yes; well?"

"Yes, sir; he married her, and they had just been married three months when one day——"

"There, there is the breakfast bell and we must not keep the ladies waiting! Come, Vandeleur, let us go down. Rip, you can let up with your gossiping until some more convenient season!" said old Storms, actually taking the arm of the stranger and leading the way down stairs.

"The demon!" muttered Vandeleur, "I am always coming in for interrupted narratives and baffled curiosity."

"My boy, money is said to be the root of all evil. It is a popular error. Curiosity is the root of all evil! I can

prove it by Holy Writ. If it hadn't been for Eve's curiosity, sin and suffering would never have entered the world. So be warned in time, and govern your curiosity before it brings you to grief," advised old Storms.

"This is the way, if you please, gentlemen," said Euripides, who had followed them closely, and who now passed quickly before them and opened the dining-room door.

CHAPTER III.

WIDOWVILLE.

Oh bright is that home when the springtime returns
And brighter than all when the evening-fire burns,
When snow falls around you and comfort within
Tells the time when the pleasures of winter begins.
—Mrs. Ellis.

The captain and his companion passed through and found themselves in a very pleasant apartment with windows looking seaward. It was warmed, as each room in that pleasant house was, by a huge fire of hickory logs, burning in the broad, open fireplace. A breakfast-table stood in the middle of the floor covered with a snow-white damask cloth, adorned with a rich silver and Sevres china service, and supplied with all the exquisite delicacies of a Maryland waterside plantation—delicious coffee and tea, light rolls and buckwheat cakes, fresh butter and new-laid eggs, fresh fish, oysters, game and poultry.

"Ah, that's good! That's worth being capsized for!" heartily exclaimed old Storms, sniffling the aroma of all these luxuries and openly venting his delight. "Ah! how do you do, Mrs. Dering? Blooming as ever, Mrs. Brooke! Ah! my beautiful Berenice! You will have to look out for your golden apples when your mother is near!" he continued, cordially shaking hands with the ladies in the turn in which he named them.

"Mr. Vandeleur," said the oldest lady, rising, and taking the hand of the stranger, "let me introduce you to my family circle. This is my daughter, Mrs. Colonel Dering. Hortensia, my dear, Mr. Vane Vandeleur."

And our wanderer found himself bowing before a tall, stout, majestic-looking woman, whose black hair was lightly streaked with gray, and surmounted by a richly-trimmed morning cap, and whose stately form was clothed in a royal purple cashmere morning dress and draped with a costly India shawl. With a graceful but rather haughty inclination of her head she acknowledged the low obeisance of the guest.

"My granddaughter, Mrs. Brooke. Rosamond, love, Mr. Vane Vandeleur," continued the old lady, bringing her recruit to the right face front before a beautiful blonde, with reddish golden hair, ultramarine-blue eyes, and still blooming complexion, looking twenty-five when she was really thirty-six. She wore her lovely hair parted in the middle and trailed in its natural ripples down each side her rosy face, and gathered into a loose knot at the back of her head. She held out her hand to the stranger and cordially welcomed him, saying:

"We have heard of the shipwreck; but we really think, as all your lives were saved, we have more cause to congratulate than to condole with you. And I for one do congratulate you with all my heart. The worst feature in your case is that you will have to stay weather-bound to this lonely seaside house, with no better company than three old women and a girl. But we will all try to lighten your affliction as well as we can," she added, laughing and showing rows of little pearly teeth.

Vandeleur began to assure her that he considered the shipwreck, which had cast him upon this coast and brought him to this house and to the society of such ladies, one of the happiest, nay, the very happiest, event of his life, when she interrupted him.

"A truce to all that! You must be made acquainted with my daughter Berenice—our baby we call her, because she is the youngest of four generations. Berry, come here, my dear, and welcome our guest."

As the lady spoke, there suddenly and silently stood by her side a form of perfect beauty and peerless grace.

The young stranger looked up, and stood face to face with his fate.

He did not know it then. Who does know it when he meets, for the first time, the being who is to have the controlling interest over his life.

Vane Vandeleur, at least, did not even guess that in Berenice Brooke he met his destiny.

But that first look showed him in an instant all that it will take me some minutes to portray.

She was perfectly beautiful, but she was more than beautiful, more than graceful, and even more than fascinating—she was most powerfully, though unconsciously,

magnetic. She had a tall, slender, but well-rounded form, with small, plump, tapering hands and feet; a round, slender waist, a full, curved bust, a stately neck and throat, and a classic head. Her face was oval, and her features were regular, delicate, and fine; her complexion was clear, pale, and pure; her hair was blue-black, bright and soft, and rippling over her temples and cheeks, but gathered up over a golden comb at the back of her head, from which it hung in a shower of long ringlets; her black eyebrows were perfect arches; her black-fringed eyes were of the darkest blue; her nose was small, straight and delicate; her lips were beautifully bowed, and deeply, vividly crimsoned—or they seemed so, in contrast to her pure, pale face. Her dress was of ruby-colored merino, relieved only by a collar and cuffs of fine linen cambric. Taken for all in all, she was very different from all the women in her family—different from the little, old, brisk and busy housewife, Madam Journey; from the dark, majestic Hortensia Dering, and from the fair-haired, blooming Rosamond Brooke.

Like some rich exotic flower among the garden plants, like some rare tropical bird among domestic poultry, was this peerless Berenice among the widows of Widowville.

Such were the thoughts that passed rapidly through the mind of Vandeleur, as he glanced at the beauty in the instant just before her mother said:

"Berry, my darling, this is Mr. Vane Vendeleur. Make him welcome to our house."

"With much pleasure. Though Mr. Vandeleur does not really need that I should make him welcome. He must feel that he is already made most cordially welcome to Henniker," said the sweetest voice with the sweetest smile that Vane had ever heard or seen.

He bowed deeply, expressing his thanks more by the eloquent glances of his large, dark, mournful eyes than by any words he could command.

"And now we will sit down to breakfast," said Mrs. Dering, moving toward the table.

Madam Journey was already in her place at the head of her board, with her butler, steward, footman, groom of the chambers—in a word, her factotum, Euripides—standing behind her chair.

"Seat yourselves, gentlemen, and, captain, take the foot of the table, if you please."

Old Storms sat down, rubbing his hands with delight as he contemplated the savory dish of broiled birds that lay before him and the pile of hot plates that stood beside him. Under any other circumstances than a heavy gale of wind or a dead calm at sea, he was a very happy and jovial old companion. He was a remarkably tall and stout old man, in stature approaching the gigantic, for he stood six feet seven in his shoes, and was broad-shouldered and deep-chested in proportion. He had a large, ruddy face, bare of beard or whiskers, but with heavy overhanging gray eyebrows, and a long, thick, gray mustache. His hair was also gray, but thin—worn off, he declared, by the constant friction of his tarpaulin hat.

The breakfast began in a very lively style.

"You-Rip" skipped about with cups of tea and coffee. Old Storms stopped rubbing his hands and began to serve out the broiled birds. And the two matrons—Mesdames Dering and Brooke, who sat the one on the right and the other on the left of Madam Journey—did the honors of the other delicacies.

A very brisk conversation was started between the old lady at the head of the table and the old sailor at the foot, in which the fair Mrs. Brooke took a lively interest, and to which even dark Mrs. Dering added an occasional word.

The talk was all about the tornado, as Madam Journey called the gale, and the shipwreck, as she called the capsize, and about the loss of the valuable cargo.

"I don't think the brig is hurt much, no, nor the heavy consignments either, unless there should happen to be a leak in the hold, which I have no reason to fear. But it is the women's Christmas finery that will suffer most. There are some India shawls and Italian silks brought down for Fulvia and Flavia that must have come to grief. Nor do I think my little Hal's riding-dress and hat and feather will be much improved by a sea bath. But what hurts me worse than all is poor Father Bonhomme's Christmas box. Well, well! it all comes in a lifetime, and won't matter a bit a hundred years hence!"

philosophically remarked the captain, as he filled his large mouth with the savory breast of a broiled bird.

"Well, but since we are such small creatures, with such short lives, we like them to be filled up with, at least, small pleasures and profits and not with great disappointments and losses," said Madam Journey.

"Yes, if we must have 'a short life,' let it be a merry one, according to the proverbs," laughed Mrs. Brooke.

"Which are said to be the wisdom of ages, but which are just as much the ignorance of the past and the folly of the present," put in Mrs. Dering. And her sage remark threw a momentary damper upon the conversation —only momentary, however, for it revived almost immediately and went on more briskly than ever.

Madame Journey had a hundred questions to ask about the world beyond her own peninsula. Had Congress elected their new Speaker? Who were the chaplains of the House and the Senate? Would Congress pass the new tariff bill? What was the state of the market? Was flour going up or down, or keeping quiet?

Old Storms answered all these questions to the best of his knowledge and belief, but at the same time expressed his surprise that the old lady had not gained the required information from the newspapers.

"Newspapers!" echoed Madam Journey, in disgust. "You know very well the mail comes down to Henniker only once a week, and half the time the papers are left behind. I wish I was at the head of that department. I think I would make some of these negligent people fly around a bit!"

"I have no doubt you would, ma'am," gallantly replied the captain.

"I have not had my paper for two weeks, so you may judge that I am behind the times with my news."

"It is too bad!—it is too bad! Let me help you to a little of this omelette, ma'am," said the captain, who evidently considered good victuals the best panacea for any sort of trouble, from a slight pain in the temper to a heavy oppression of the soul.

Mrs. Brooke also had many questions to ask upon subjects that interested her. Did the captain notice the shop windows, or the ladies on the promenade? and could he

tell her what style of bonnets were worn, or if any new patterns in shawls or dresses had come out? To all of which old Storms replied, rubbing his head and laughing:

"My dear madam, I am nothing but a poor, stupid sailor. I think I know a lady's shoe from a lady's bonnet; but, if I do, that is the extent of my knowledge of her rigging. I sometimes hear such words as merino, illusion, satin, and so on, dinged into my ears by my female acquaintances; but I haven't the least idea what they mean, except—yes, merino is something to trim lace caps with, and illusion is a heavy woolen fabric for strong outer garments. I wish I could answer your questions satisfactorily, but you see what a dunce I am, and you have a right to laugh at me."

In fact, Madam Journey and Mrs. Brooke were both laughing heartily.

"All right, captain! You are a dear old soul; and any answer that provokes a laugh in this humdrum house is satisfactory," said Mrs. Rosamond.

While this lively conversation was going on around the table, there were two persons who took no part in it—Vane Vandeleur and Berenice Brooke, who sat, the first on the right and the last on the left hand of old Storms, near the foot of the table. They were, therefore, directly opposite each other, with only the breadth of the board between them.

And, from the time Vane took his seat, he had eyes, ears, mind, for no one and for nothing in this world but for his opposite neighbor; though when he was addressed he answered affably; and when the delicacies of the table were courteously tendered to him, he as courteously accepted or declined them.

But through all, his real attention was entirely absorbed by Berenice Brooke. He was "a very perfect gentleman," and therefore he did not stare at the young lady, but observed her whenever he could do so unobserved, and seemed to see her, in his mind's eye, all the while.

She was beautiful exceedingly, yet seemed to grow even more beautiful on contemplation. Could the brightest golden tresses compare in beauty with the rich, deep,

blue-black hue of her lustrous locks? Could azure eyes rival her large, soft, dark, long-lashed orbs? Could the rosiest cheek vie with the clear, pale hue of her oval face? he asked himself as he looked on her. There was mind, soul, spirit, passion there. How came she among these commonplace ladies, this creature all redolent and breathing of Oriental life and loveliness? Their daughter! It seemed scarcely possible.

Berenice seldom opened her lips or raised her eyes; yet when she did either, her words and glances were full of sweetness and grace.

The pleasant morning meal was much prolonged.

But when, at last, brisk little Madam Journey gave the signal for all to rise from the table, she said:

"Gentlemen, the house is at your disposal. There are fires in all the rooms. When you feel disposed to honor us with your company, you will find us in the sitting-room, the one into which you were first shown. Pray, think yourselves at home and do just as you please."

Vane Vendeleur bowed and expressed his thanks in very courteous terms.

Old Storms said:

"Since we are left to our devices then, ma'am, I think I will find my way below stairs and see how my poor fellows are faring; and then we will go and take a look at the *Carrier*."

"Do so, captain. You will not have far to go to look for your brig. Euripides tells me that she is aground just below our long, old fields. We dine at two, captain. Don't be later than that; for I shall be anxious to hear of the condition of the *Carrier*."

"Thank you, ma'am. I shall be punctual. I never was late at meals in my life! Will you come, Vandeleur?"

"Thanks, no. I prefer to remain with the ladies, if they will kindly permit me."

"Well, well—that is a natural preference at your age. Good-by till I see you again. Good-morning, ladies."

The ladies left the dining-room and dispersed in different directions—that is to say, all but Madam Journey, who remained fluttering about the breakfast-table, seeing to the safe removal of her costly silver plate, and her fine Sevres china.

Vane Vandeleur made his way to the ladies' sitting-room, as the most likely place for him to meet the soonest the beautiful Berenice Brooke.

The room was now empty of human beings, but full of the still life so suggestive of the frequent presence of youth and beauty. The guitar and the harp leaned against the piano. Tinted and scented note paper lay scattered over the writingdesk. Delicate baskets, needlebooks, pincushions, unfinished embroidery, and other signs of woman's work, were littered over the center-table. He picked up one after another of these elegant trifles; among the rest a cobweb handkerchief, light as mist, white as snow, and redolent of the heavy and passionate aroma of otto of roses. With a singular smile he held up this fine web, and saw in its center the initials "B. B."

"I might have known that it was hers, without looking for her ciphers. I might have known it by its aroma of roses, for the rose is her flower; and not the gay rose, but the rich, pale, cream-colored tea rose."

And he pressed the delicate toy to his face, as if only to inhale its fragrance. He would have liked to put it in his bosom, and to keep it there, but—he was not yet crazy enough to commit a petit larceny.

He turned from the table to look at the pictures on the walls. With the exception of the two mirrors, one of which filled up the space above the mantelpiece, and the other that between the two tall front windows, the walls were literally covered with pictures.

Among the pictures hung the portraits of the three widows in their youth. There was Madam Journey as a golden-haired, azure-eyed girl, in the dress of a shepherdess, with a lamb at her feet, a crook in her hand, and chaplet of wild flowers on her head. There was Mrs. Dering, painted as Pallas, Minerva, Bellona, or some other warlike goddess or battle-ax heroine, with helmet, lance, and shield. There was fair Rosamond Brooke, drawn as Flora, and crowned, canopied, and nearly covered with flowers. But nowhere was there a portrait of beautiful Berenice Brooke; and nowhere, in any of the "counterfeit presentments" of her forefathers and mothers, was the slightest likeness of herself to be traced.

She might have been altogether of another race, for any resemblance between herself and her ancestors.

While he was still staring at the pictures, the door opened, and old Euripides appeared with several big logs upon his shoulders.

"I recognize the portraits of the ladies of the house, but I would like you to show me those of their deceased husbands, if they are here," said Vandeleur, turning to the old man.

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir; with the greatest of pleasure, sir; just as soon as ever I puts these logs on to the fire," replied Euripides.

And when he had accomplished his task, he came and placed himself at the disposal of the young man.

"Show me first of all Captain Jernyngham's portrait," said Valdeleur.

"Yes, sir; come this way, sir, please. This is it hanging up in this recess, just above Madam Journey's work-table. She allers likes to sit there and work, and look up at the pictur', sir," said Euripides, pointing to the portrait of a very large, dark-complexioned man, in the naval uniform of the Revolutionary age.

"His daughter, Mrs. Dering, is very like him," remarked Vandeleur.

"Miss Hortensia was the image of him, sir; that is, as much as a lady can be the image of a gentleman."

"And now, Colonel Dering?"

"Yes, sir; this is him hanging over the piano," said Euripides, pointing to the portrait of a fiery, red-haired, sanguine-complexioned little fellow, in the army uniform of 1812.

"There is where Mrs. Brooke gets her roses and lilies," said Vandeleur.

"Yes, sir; it must be from her father, for Miss Rosamond never was a bit like her mother, either in looks or in ways."

"Now show me Mr. Brooke's portrait," said Vandeleur.

"Marse Ralph's? Oh, sir!" sighed the old man, as his face suddenly fell.

"What is the matter?" inquired Vandeleur.

"Well, sir, if you must know, Marse Ralph's portrait ain't never showed."

"Oh! if that is so, I will not, of course, ask to see it. I would not, upon any account, have you break a rule for my gratification," said Vandeleur. But even while he spoke, he felt a greater desire than ever before to see the portrait of Berenice Brooke's father, over whose past fate, as over her future one, some dark, sad mystery seemed to hang.

"Oh, no, sir, there is no rule, nor likewise no law ag'in showin' of it, only we don't like to look at it, sir, that's all. I'll show it to you if you wish to see it, sir."

"I would rather not tax your feelings."

"Never mind my feelings, marster. Here's the picter, sir. You would take this to be a windy, but it is only a false windy, put here for symmetry. Now, look," said the old man, drawing aside a curtain, from what had seemed a closed window, and revealing a picture that immediately arrested and riveted the attention of the beholder. It was the portrait of a very handsome man, of medium height and elegant form, with a stately head, covered with soft, rippling, blue-black hair, classic features, and a pale, pure, olive complexion, lighted up by large, soft, deep-blue eyes. So fine, so pure, so passionate; so delicate, so perfectly beautiful, was this face, that Vandeleur stood transfixed and spellbound before it. It seemed to be Berenice Brooke in another dress.

Vandeleur gazed on in mute admiration and wonder. What had been the fate of the man who was as beautiful as an archangel? And was it his fate that so overshadowed his daughter's life as to make it crime in her to love, and ruin for her to marry?

For some moments he gazed and brooded, and then at last he turned to the old man at his side and said:

"You began to tell me something about this gentleman, but you were interrupted. Will you go on with the account now—that is, if there is nothing improper in your relation of it."

"Hi marster, how improper? It was all in the newspapers!"

"Then proceed. I feel a deep interest in the subject."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD MAN'S TALE.

She was a form of life and light
That seen became a part of sight,
The Rose where'er I turned my eye,
The Morning Star of memory.—BYRON.

"Well, sir," said Euripides, commencing his story, "all my old mistisses were beautiful women in their day and generation, as I can bear witness who saw them in their youth; and as you can see for yourself, by looking at their likenesses; but, of all, Miss Rosamond was the most beautiful in her girlhood."

"She is beautiful still," put in Vandeleur.

"Well, sir, on her seventeenth birthday, which came upon the first of May, my mistisses gave a great ball to celebrate the birthday of their May Rose, as they called her. And they invited all the best people in the three counties around, including, of course, the priests of St. Rosalie's."

"Do priests attend balls?"

"I don't know, sir, whether they do, as a general custom, but anyways Father Bonhomme——"

"Bonhomme?" exclaimed the young man.

"Yes, sir; Father Bonhomme came to Miss Rosamond's birthday ball, and, which is more, brought with him some one else who was not invited. And this was a young gentleman who was staying on a visit to the priests at St. Rosalie's, and his name was Mr. Raphael Brooke."

"The same who gathered your Rose of the World?"

"Yes, sir; the very same, sir. Well, sir, Father Bonhomme introduced him to my mistisses, who welcomed him as they would have welcomed any gentleman brought to the house by Father Bonhomme."

"Or by anybody else, for that matter," observed Vandeleur, remembering his own very hospitable reception by the ladies of Henniker.

"Yes, sir, very likely. Well, my mistisses, in turn,

introduced the stranger to all the best company in the house that night. And I tell you, sir, he made what the young ladies call a—a—a—sen—sens—sens——"

"Sensation?" suggested Vandeleur.

"Yes, sir, a sensation; and if you believe me he was the handsomest man in the ballroom; and if you doubt my words, there's his portarait, sir—you can examine it for yourself."

"I can well credit your statement," said Vandeleur, raising his eyes to the veiled picture.

"Well, sir, the rumor went that more than our fair lady lost her heart that night; but he, sir—he had no eyes for nobody but our Rose of the World."

"And she?"

"And similarly, sir, she had no eyes for any one but him. If ever I saw love at first sight, sir, there it was. Well, sir, to make a long story short, it was the first of May when Master Raphael first met Miss Rosamond, and on the first of July they was engaged to be married, and on the first of October they was married, with the consent of all their relations and the good wishes of all their friends. Ah, sir, if they could have seen the end!" sighed the old man, drawing his coatsleeves across his eyes and falling into a thoughtful silence that lasted until Vandeleur jogged his memory with an admonitory:

"Well?"

"Well, sir, they had a grand wedding—one of the grandest ever seen in these parts, I reckon. That wedding waked snakes, sir, that it did. Why, it is said that it didn't cost my mist'esss less than two thousand dollars! But then, you see, she was an only daughter, sir, and an heiress, and she was a marrying of an only son and an heir. So there was to be a great blowout."

"Naturally."

"After the wedding sir, they went for a tour through the North, and were gone about two months, or a little more. And then they came back here to spend Christmas with the old ladies before going down to their estate in South Carolina for the winter. Very anxious Miss Rosamond was to see this beautiful estate, which was called the 'Palmettoes,' and about which Mr. Ralph

was always talking. Ah! but she was doomed never to see that lovely place."

"Euripides! Euripides! Euripides! Where are you?" called the voice of Madam Journey from without.

"Here I am, mist'ess! Been putting wood on the fire in the sitting-room! Coming directly, ma'am!" answered the negro, and, without a word of excuse, he bolted out of the room.

"Am I never to hear the end of that story?" sighed Vandeleur, beginning to walk the floor.

But the old lady met her servant on the threshold and stopped him there, saying:

"I have been looking at Captain Storms through my glass; and I think that he wants more help than his crew can give him; but I know that he would die before he would ask for it. So go down to him, Euripides, and tell him that any or all of my boats and of my men are at his service if he can use them in securing his cargo and righting his vessel. And if he should accept my offer, then go you to my men and tell them to place themselves at Captain Storms' orders. Now hurry off with yourself."

Having thus dismissed her faithful servant, the old lady entered the sitting-room and closed the door.

"I hope you find something here among the books and musical instruments to amuse you, Mr. Vandeleur," she said, as she placed herself in her chair beside her own especial little workstand, over which hung the likeness of her deceased husband.

"Thanks. I have been most interested in these family portraits," said Vane, with a smile.

"And with my old servant's legends connected with them, eh? He never was under fire in his life, yet nothing pleases him better than to fight over again the sea-fight in which my husband fell, and the Indian skirmish in which my son-in-law was slain—as he imagined them to have been fought. He is a very good servant, but he has one great fault; he is an incorrigible gossip. I'll warrant he bored you?"

"Not at all, madam. He deeply interested me in the history of the gallant Captain Jerynyngham, and the brave Colonel Dering," said Vane, politely.

"Yes, men were brave and gallant in those times, and women were modest and discreet. That is more, I fear, than can be said of their sons and daughters of these days. Well, well, I belong to an age that has passed away, and so without doubt I am behind the times," said Madam Journey with a sigh.

Vane was about to make some courteous disclaimer, when the door opened, and the beautiful Berenice Brooke entered the room.

Vane arose with a bow, and sat a chair for her.

She accepted the courtesy with a bright smile and a graceful bend of her head.

And from that moment, as at breakfast, Vane Vandeleur had eyes and ears for nothing, and no one else in the room.

"Old Euripides has been at his tricks again, my dear Berry. He has been boring our guest with the history of all our dead heroes," said Madam Journey with a smile.

Berenice turned a very deprecating glance toward her grandmother, and then a very pleading one upon her guest, as she answered:

"I do not blame him at all. I think it is fine to see an old servant so identify himself with his mistress' family, as to appropriate all its honors."

"I agree with you entirely," said Vandeleur, in a low voice. "I was deeply interested in the stories of your old retainer."

"I am glad if he amused instead of fatigued you," observed Berenice.

"Thanks," answered Vandeleur, with a bow.

And as he glanced at his beautiful companion, he felt well assured that neither Berenice nor her grandmother had the slightest suspicion that their old servant's ruling passion had actually carried him far beyond the bounds of discretion, in leading him to unveil the hidden picture, and to reveal at least a portion of its secret history. And he reproached himself that he had let curiosity, or even interest, blind him to the impropriety of listening to the servant's tales, and encouraging his love of gossip.

The next arrivals in the room were Mrs. Dering and Mrs. Brooke—the beautiful Rosamond of the negro's story.

And the ladies gathered around the central worktable, and with them and their young guest the morning passed pleasantly.

A little before two o'clock old Storms returned to the house, followed by his man Jack, bearing a huge chest upon his shoulders.

The old mariner came in red, hearty, jovial, and seeming to bring with him all the keenness of the wintry wind, and the crispness of the icy frost.

"Sit that chest down in the hall, Jack, and leave it there; the madam will give it house room, I reckon. And you get yourself back to the brig as fast as you can, and bear a hand to getting out the cargo," his hearty voice was heard to say, as he entered the house.

The next moment he opened the sitting-room door and came in.

"Come to the fire, captain! You look frost-bitten," said Madam Journey, making room for him.

"Thank you, madam. How are the ladies?"

"We are much better for seeing you, Captain Storms. We have been pining over your absence," said Mrs. Brooke.

"Ah! yes, that is quite natural," replied the veteran sailor, as he stood before the fire, warming his hands.

"And how about the vessel and the cargo, captain?" inquired the old lady.

"The vessel, ma'am, will not be righted to-day nor to-morrow. She lays with her masts toward the land. We shall have to wait until we can get the help of a larger craft than any we have got here now before we can bring her round. But the cargo is all right, ma'am. We are getting it out as fast as we can. And if you can give us storage for it, it will be safe."

"I'm very glad to hear it. Yes, there's the old tobacco-house that is at your service, if that will do."

"The very place, ma'am—thank you."

"And, now, captain, if you want to go to your room before dinner, you have just fifteen minutes."

"Thank you, madam. I have had my kit brought up, and would like to doff this Revolutionary uniform for something more appropriate to the nineteenth century, if you please; and so if you will kindly permit one of your

servants to help me carry my chest upstairs, I'll be much obliged to you."

"Certainly," said Madam Journey, touching the bell.

Euripides appeared, and was ordered to attend the captain, who then left the room, followed by the old servant.

The dinner that day was worthy of the hospitality of Henniker and the housekeeping of Madam Journey. There were fish, oysters, roast and boiled joints, poultry, forest game and water fowl. And there were exquisite pies, puddings, custards and jellies, such as could be prepared by no one else under the sun but Aunt 'Cuba, under the immediate supervision of Madam Journey.

The evening was spent in cards and in music.

The old mariner and the three widows played a rubber of whist.

And Berenice and Vandeleur sang duets at the piano.

They kept early hours at Widowville, so at ten o'clock exactly, old Euripides appeared with a silver tray upon which stood a half-dozen lighted bedroom candles.

Madam Joruney arose and said:

"Gentlemen, the servant will show you to your sleeping-rooms when you are ready."

The old sailor was tired enough after his twenty-four hours of hard work on ship and shore, against wind and tide to feel willing to go to bed. So he got up to bid the ladies good-night.

And Vandeleur, whether he liked it or not, felt obliged to follow his example.

Old Euripides led them upstairs to the room in which they had changed their dress that morning.

"One of you, gentlemen, will sleep here, and the other in this inner chamber," said Euripides, opening a door that communicated between two apartments.

"Very well, we'll settle that between us," said old Storms.

"Here is wood enough to keep up the fires in both rooms, and here is hot and cold water, and clean towels. Anything else, gentlemen, if you please?" inquired Euripides.

"No; we don't want anything else but sleep—so be off with you!" growled old Storms.

Euripides bowed and beat his retreat.

"Now, Vandeleur, take your choice between the two rooms, will you? I am as tired as a dog and want to go to bed."

"Well, I will take the inner chamber," answered Vandeleur, willing to give the larger and better apartment to the elder man.

"All right; good-night, and happy dreams to you!" said the captain, by way of a gentle hint for the departure of his companion.

But, instead of going, Vandeleur threw himself into a chair before the blazing fire, laid back his head, and stuck out his feet.

"Isn't there a fire in your room," demanded the captain, beginning to undress himself.

"Yes, I believe so," said Vandeleur, coolly.

"Then why don't you go to it?"

"I want you to tell me the story you promised me on the vessel," said the young man.

"You want—what?"

"The story you promised me."

"Well, you won't get it. Didn't I tell you in the beginning that, if I thought you would ever be in the neighborhood of Henniker, I never would tell it you at all? And here you are at Widowville itself, right in among the widows, and you want me to tell you! I'll see you—wrecked first! Go to bed, boy! Go to bed! and don't seek to pry into family secrets," growled the old sailor.

Vandeleur kept his temper; he was much too curious and interested in the subject to afford to lose it. So he said:

"Tell me, at least, is it absolutely certain that this young heiress must never marry!"

"Yes, I told you so before. Now go to bed."

"And now another question: Do you know anything of the history and fate of Mr. Raphael Brooke?"

"Maybe I do, and maybe I don't, my young friend. Go to bed."

"At least, tell me this: Was there anything in her father's character or history that should prevent her marriage?"

"Nothing in the world Bad as that was, there is something much worse behind that. Good-night!"

"Then her father's life and the story in no way affects her destiny?"

"No. Good-night!"

"And yet the old negro——"

"The old negro—he is in his dotage. If he were not he never would chatter of family affairs to a stranger. He must be looked to. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said the young man, between a smile and a sigh, as he passed into his own room.

A very cheerful room it was, with a wood fire burning in the fireplace, a bright red carpet on the floor, and snow-white curtains around the bed and at the windows.

"Indeed, all that he had yet seen within the house was bright and cheerful. The ladies themselves appeared gay and happy. What then, was the dark pall of fate that overhung the youngest, the most lovely of their race, the darling, the treasure of their house, shutting out from her young life all the brightness of love?

Ruminating over these mysteries, Vandeleur felt no disposition to retire to bed. He threw himself into the easy-chair before the fire, and gave his mind up to wonder and conjecture.

Some little time passed and all was still. He heard the deep breathing of the old sailor in his profound sleep in the adjoining room, heard the shiver of the dried leaves against the windows outside, and the low singing of the green logs, as they simmered on his fire. These lulling sounds were rather soothing than otherwise, and had not his mind been so active, his imagination so excited, he might have slept. Perhaps he did sleep, for he spoke of the strange experience of that night as a dream.

While he sat there in his easy-chair upon the rug, the light of the fire suddenly flared up and then died entirely out.

And forth from the darkness glided a form, black-robed, pale, shadowy—and with the features of Raphael Brooke.

Vandeleur was about to rise and exclaim, when the spectral form paused before him, raised its white hand, and seemed to freeze him into ice, while from the pallid lips came these words:

"Fly for your life! The cavern of the Circe was never more fatal than the halls of Henniker!"

"But why?—why?" exclaimed Vandeleur, recovering the power of speech and motion, and starting up to stay the ghostly visitor.

But he found himself alone, with the fire black upon the hearth and the candle out in its socket.

"What a dream!" he said, as, shivering with cold and with a nameless horror, he undressed in the darkness and went to bed.

And thus ended his first night in Widowville.

CHAPTER V.

FATAL LOVE.

Devoted love will find its way
Thro' paths where wolves would fear to prey.
And if it dares so much, 'twere hard
Such brave love met not some reward.—BYRON.

They kept early hours at Widowville. And this rule applied to the rising as well as the retiring of the household. However late people might sit up in their own room at night, that inexorable martinet, Madam Journey, had every able-bodied man and maidservant up and at work by six o'clock in the morning; and every member of the family, and every guest in the house, who was not ill, gathered around the breakfast board at eight.

She was the oldest individual on the premises, she said, and if she could get up, it stood to reason other people might do the same. Madam Journey, like other martinets, made no account of difference in temperaments.

So at seven o'clock precisely old Storms was aroused from a deep dream of winds and waves, cargoes and bills of lading, by the loud reveille beat upon his door by the ancient groom of the chambers, Euripides.

"Well! well! well! well! don't tear down the door! I thought to be sure we were in a storm at sea, and the ship had struck a rock, and gone to pieces with a great crash. And it is you all the time, confound you, you barbarian," growled old Storms, as he leaped out of bed and opened the door.

There stood "You Rip," with a bucket of cold water in one hand, a kettle of boiling water in the other, a load of fresh towels over his arm, and a basket of kindling-wood on his head.

"Please, marster, mistress told me to tell you as she had got canvasback ducks, steamed with celery sauce, for breakfast, sir, and as they ought to be eat the minit they are took from the fire," said You Rip, slyly, practicing upon old Tom's master passion.

"What? Canvasback ducks? Has she, indeed? and steamed, too? Delicious! And with celery sauce! Perfectly delightful! No one but your accomplished mistress should ever be favored with the possession of a canvas-back duck, for no one else knows how to cook one. Other idiots roast them, stuffed with sage and onions—pah!" exclaimed the old gourmand, as he hastily drew on his trousers.

You Rip relieved himself of his burdens with perfect safety to them and to his own person, though it was a feat of gymnastics to let down either kettle or bucket without dropping the basket of kindling-wood. However, the "feat" was successfully accomplished, and the "Greek" (as Mrs. Rosamond Dering often called him, in allusion to his name) proceeded to light the fire and fill the ewers in the captain's room.

Then he passed into the inner chamber, occupied by the young stranger, who still lay on the bed, with his hands clasped above his dark hair, not sleeping, but dreaming of the beautiful girl who, scarcely twenty-four hours before, had crossed his path for the first time in life.

"Please, young marster, the ladies is all downstairs in their sitting-parlor, sir," said Euripides, using the argument he believed would be most likely to prevail with the younger guest.

"Are they? Then I must not keep them waiting breakfast," exclaimed the young man, as he sprang up and prepared to dress.

The "Greek" lighted his fire, filled his ewers, laid out his towels, and then stood lingering, as if waiting orders.

Very willingly would Vandeleur have caught at this opportunity of asking the old man to go on with his family history. But something that Captain Storms had said the night before had raised doubts in the mind of Vane as to the honorableness of encouraging a servant to speak of family affairs.

"Can I do anything else for you, young marster, sir, if you please?" inquired You Rip, pulling the front lock of his wool, and lingering, as if anxious to stay, and perhaps willing to talk.

It was a sore temptation to Vane, but he put it away from him, and answered, kindly:

"Thanks, no; you can go."

"On the table at eight precisely, sir," said the old negro, as he bowed himself out of the room.

Vane was soon ready, and went out to join his companion, who was impatiently awaiting him in the outer chamber.

"Well! so you have come out at last. And now if the canvasback ducks are spoiled it will be your fault," growled the old man.

"A kindly morning salutation; but look there!" laughed Vandeleur, pointing to the captain's own chronometer that, saved from the ship, now adorned the mantelshelf. "By your unerring guide it is now a quarter to eight, and we have fifteen minutes to spare."

They went downstairs and found the ladies in their favorite room.

After the usual morning salutations they all went to breakfast. Vane was permitted to lead Berenice to the table. He drew her little hand within his arm—her beautiful hand, that was at once so plump, so slender and so tapering. He felt it flutter like a bird in his clasp; he felt it thrill him like a shock from an electric battery—her little, potent hand with its magical touch! He longed, yet dared not, to seek her eyes; yearned, yet ventured not, to speak to her. A passion, sudden as it was overwhelming, possessed him, absorbed him, weakened, deafened, blinded him, for the moment—struck him dumb. Her clasp was on his arm. In a dizzy whirl of emotion, half strange pain, half keen delight, he placed her in her chair and took his own seat at the table.

And the "delicacies of the season" were served. But as for him, the breakfast might have consisted of parched corn, or oatmeal porridge, for aught he knew of what he ate or drank that morning.

"You are a gone-er," said old Tom Storms to him, when they found themselves alone in the sitting-room, after breakfast, before the ladies came in. "You are a gone-er, Vandeleur."

"What do you mean? I don't understand you," said Vane.

"Why, when a man can eat canvasback ducks, dressed as they are dressed at Widowville, in such a fit of absence of mind as you ate yours, I mean to say he must be meditating matrimony or murder. I exonerate you of murder, so it must be matrimony. Now, which of the fair widows of Widowville is it? As for me, blowed if I'm not in love with them all three, and with the old lady most of all. Because why? Reason sufficient, she is the best cook all out! Wonder why no man ever married any one of them?"

"Probably because no man could ever get any one of them," said Vane.

"That's it, you may depend! No man could ever get any of them. I suppose they love their liberty too well. It is said that a woman is never free until she is a widow. In her girlhood she is under her parents; in her wifehood she belongs to her husband; but in her widowhood she belongs to herself. So I suppose these ladies love their liberty. But, blest if I think three charming women have any right to live as they have lived. Blamed, if the law would let me, if I wouldn't coax 'em all to marry me; but, you see, the laws won't. Call this a free country, indeed, where a man is not allowed to be guided by his own conscience in these strictly domestic matters. I have a great mind to emigrate to Utah, and take all the widows along with me," said old Storms, as he poked the fire and raised a shower of sparks.

"Do so, captain; but don't forget the little preliminary of winning the widows' consent," laughed Vandeleur.

"Ah, ta, ta, ta, ta, that's understood!" crowed old Tom, patting him on the head.

"It is a wonder to me, captain, why such a devoted squire of dames as yourself never married again," said Vane, carelessly.

He was looking out of the window, and paying really very little attention to the words of his old friend.

"Haven't I just told you the reason. The law wouldn't let me marry all the ladies, and I couldn't make up my mind to take one and leave the rest."

"Considerate—— But come here, captain, do, and tell me who is that queer old creature coming to the house?

Is it not the veritable Wandering Jew?" inquired Vane, breaking off with sudden animation to ask this question.

Old Tom slowly approached the window and looked out.

The figure that was seen approaching might well have been mistaken for *le Juif Errant*. It was that of a small, thin, dried-up old man. He was clothed in a long, rusty cloth coat that was buttoned closely round his body and reached nearly to his feet, which were shod with old, shabby shoes. His head was covered with an old, high-crowned hat that might once have been black, but was now worn down to a napless, rusty brown. In his hand he bore a long staff, upon which he leaned. With his head bowed upon his breast, the features of his face could not be fairly seen. He seemed to be a hundred years of age at least. He might well have been taken for some ancient pilgrim or hermit, or, as we said, for the Wandering Jew himself.

"In the name of Methuselah, who is that odd old fossil?" again inquired Vane.

The captain lowered his voice as he answered:

"He is Father Ignatius, the oldest priest of St. Rosalie, and the holiest man in the community."

"Father Ignatius?—St. Rosalie? Didn't I hear somebody say something about a Father Bonhomme being priest of St. Rosalie?"

"Possibly—but you didn't hear me say so; probably it was that leaky old vessel, You Rip. At any rate, there is more than one priest at St. Rosalie's; there are—there are three: Father Ignatius here, who is the oldest; Father Bonhomme, who is the second; and Father Francis, who is the youngest; and each as different in all respects from the others as it is possible for men to be. You see what Papa Ignatius is—a little, old, dried-up, ben-over anatomy of a man. Well, Papa Bonhomme is middle-aged, short, fat, round and rosy, with merry blue eyes and a chirruping voice. And Father Francis is young and handsome, tall, and slender, with hazel eyes and brown, waving hair; and fit to turn the heads of all the girls in the country if he were not a priest. But here is the old codger coming up the steps. We shall have him in here soon," said old Tom.

Vane was watching that ancient man, whose form and face attracted him as by some weird spell. His face, on nearer view, was a wonder to behold. It was such a hoary ruin of a face; so pale, so gray, so worn, so shrunken, so withered, so wrinkled. There was but little hair upon his head, and that was white as lint; there was not a vestige of eyebrows left; and his eyes were extremely small, jet black, and, deeply sunk into their sockets; but, wonder of wonders, they were as clear and brilliant as the orbs of youth. His hand shook and trembled as he stretched it out to raise the knocker.

So much Vane was enabled to notice him from his post of observation at the window, before the door was opened and the visitor disappeared within the hall.

Then they heard voices—first the weak, quavering, tremulous tones of the old priest, asking:

"Is Madam Jernyngham at home and disengaged at this hour?"

And then they heard the reverent tone of Euripides, replying:

"La, yes, marster-father; old mist'ress hardly ever goes way from home these here days."

"Then let her know that I am here. She sent for me."

"And she expects you, marse, does old mist'ress; for she's goed and shet herself up to wait for you."

"Ah! madam relied upon me. She had reason. Show me to her presence then."

And now the voices ceased and the steps passed on.

"The old madam has sent for her guide, philosopher and friend for a private interview. There is something up!" said old Storms. "Yes, yes, there is something up. There is something up!"

"With which we have no sort of concern," observed Vane, with significance, meaning to pay the captain off for his rebukes of the night before.

"No, that's true, we haven't, so I'll go and look after my ship," laughed old Tom, leaving the room.

But when Vane Vandeleur made his last speech he was much mistaken. He had some concern in the priest's visit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD PRIEST OF ST. ROSALIE.

His very manners teach amend,
They are so even, grave and holy;
No stubbornness so stiff, no folly,
In license ever was so light,
As twice to trespass in his sight;
His look would so correct it when
It chid the vice, yet not the men.—BEN JONSON.

Madam Journey, unlike many ladies of the old style, never affected much state. She was thoroughly domestic, an excellent manager, and household economy was her hobby. She kept but a small retinue of servants, was her own housekeeper and received her intimate friends as often as not "in her housekeeping room"—a pleasant apartment in the rear of the dining-room, where she kept her pickles and preserves, her home-made wines and cordials, and her fine china and glass; and whence she issued her orders to her cook in the back kitchen.

On this particular morning the old lady stood before a large open cupboard, engaged in weighing out spices and candied fruits for the day's pudding.

By her side stood Hecuba, or 'Cuba, as she was generally called, holding in her hands a large waiter upon which stood several plates to receive the condiments in question. This Hecuba was a tall, thin, scraggy negro woman, with large features, that would have been very harsh had they not been redeemed by mild, beaming, black eyes and a smiling mouth that revealed rows of perfect teeth that any young beauty might have envied.

If Euripides was Madam Journey's right hand, Hecuba was her left. Hecuba filled in her department the position corresponding to that of Euripides in his. She was head cook, chief laundress and upper housemaid. To be sure, she had two or three young colored girls under her, to lighten her labors, but who, she declared, were the plagues of her life, because they hin-

dered more than they helped her, and made more work than they did.

"And now, 'Cuba," the old lady was saying, "be sure you don't go and grind the allspice in the coffee-mill again, as you did the last time. It spoils both the spice and the coffee. I vow I haven't got over the burning in my stomach yet that you gave me through grinding that mace in the coffee-mill and afterwards grinding the Mocha in it."

" 'Twasn't me, mist'ess. 'Deed it 'twasn't. I told you so before, you know. It was that there good-for-nothing gal Sary. And she left 'bout half a ounce o' mace into the mill and ground it up long o' the coffee—that she did! She'll pisen us all some of these days—that she will. Didn't I catch her yesterday morning a-greasing of the griddle for the buckwheat cakes with the end of a tallor candle!" exclaimed Hecuba, with an aggrieved and indignant expression.

"But you must look after her, you must see to her, you must teach her, 'Cuba. You can't expect a green young kitchen maid to know her business by instinct. You must teach her and watch her."

"Well, then I'd a heap leifer do all the work myself. 'Sides which I can't keep my eyes on 'em all. Why this very morning as ever was, while I was showing that ninny-hammer how to shred the celery for the sauce, didn't that there other noodle in the washhouse go and pop all Miss Hortensia's thread laces down into the blue-water—offen and offen as I've telled her laces ought to have a yaller tinge and not a blue one! Mist'ess! mark my words—them there gals will turn my brain yet!"

Just as these ominous words were spoken, and before Madam Journey could reply to them, the door was opened by Euripides, who announced:

"Father Ignatius, madam."

The poor, old, broken-down priest entered alone. The servant retired and closed the door after him.

"There, 'Cuba, take these things out at once and mind what I told you," said the old lady, quickly dismissing her attendant.

Then turning to her visitor and spiritual director, she held out her hand, saying:

"How do you do, Father Ignatius. Take this chair and sit down at once. Give me your hat. I thank you for coming so soon; though I hardly dared to expect you to-day. The creek is so rough. You found it so, did you not?"

"The creek is rough," admitted the old man, as he sank wearily into the offered chair and placed his old, napless hat on the floor beside him,—"the creek is rough; but we crossed it in safety."

"Ah, father, you always come when you are called. We should all consider that and be very careful how we call you. You give yourself no rest."

"I have all eternity to rest in—that is, if my sins will let me," replied the priest, meekly bowing his head.

"Your sins! I wonder what they are! Oh, I know! Sins against yourself! Depriving yourself of the barest necessaries of life that others may have its comforts."

"'Having food and raiment,' I 'should be therewith content,'" murmured the priest.

"And venturing out in all weathers without the slightest regard to your own life and health, no matter how unimportant may be the errand upon which you may be called," continued Madam Journey, finishing her speech without regard to the priest's interjected disclaimer.

"But, my daughter, I knew that, when you sent for me, the matter in which I was wanted could be no trifle."

"I'm not so sure about that. It may be an affair of the greatest interest; or it may be an old woman's fancy."

"And am I to be the judge to decide which it is to be, my daughter?"

"Yes, father."

"What is it, then?"

"You heard of the shipwreck on our shore?"

"I heard about the *Carrier* being blown ashore and capsized. Your messenger told me that; but he also told me that no lives had been lost and that neither vessel nor cargo had sustained any serious injury."

"No; loss of time and labor seem to be the worst consequences," said Madam Journey, reflectively; "but, father, there was one passenger came by that vessel—

only one. He is a young man, a stranger in these parts, and he is staying in this house. It is of him I wish to speak."

"Well, my daughter?"

"Now what, of all the names in the world, do you think his name is?"

"A large number to choose from. I am an ill hand at guessing," gently replied the priest.

"It is Vane Vandeleur."

"Vane Vandeleur!" exclaimed the priest.

"Yes, father. When he named himself to me, you might have blown me over with a breath—I couldn't recover myself for some time."

"Vane Vandeleur!" again exclaimed the priest.

"Yes, I say."

"It is very extraordinary."

"Isn't it now; do you wonder that I sent for you?"

"Not at all; all my wonder is employed upon that name. It cannot be a mere coincidence of names?"

"Why, no; how can it? If it were John Thompson, or Thomas Johnson, or James Brown, or any such common name, it might be a mere coincidence; but Vane Vandeleur, father!"

The old priest, holding the staff between his knees, bowed his head down upon it in deep thought.

"But he spells his name V-a-n-e V-a-n-d-e-l-e-u-r."

"Not as it stands in the old documents and records?"

"No; for there it is written V-e-y-n-e V-a-n-d-e-l-i-e-r-r-e—Veyne Vandelierre."

"You are sure of this difference in spelling?"

"Yes; I am familiar enough with that in the old land patents, and I saw his on his pocket handkerchief."

"The sound is the same; the name is the same; the difference in the orthography may be the effect of time, chance, or caprice. What is he like, this young man?"

"He is very handsome, father, very handsome indeed—one of the handsomest young men you ever saw in your life."

"So was the other one, it is said. But that is a woman's description and tells nothing. There is an endless variety in handsome men. Be more explicit, my daughter."

"Well, he is of about the middle height, I should say;

slender, well knit, and very graceful; he has abundant dark hair, and large dark eyes; his complexion is also very dark—too dark for any American who has not a streak of African or Indian blood in his veins; his voice is soft and his ways are gentle; he looks like a foreigner, and dresses, moves, and speaks like a gentleman."

"Hum—have you any likeness anywhere of the other one?"

"I don't know. I remember there used to be an old, worn oil painting, blurred and cracked, and nearly illegible, that was thrown away among the worst rubbish in the garret where I used to play when I was a child. It was said to have been his portrait. It may be in some cubby-hole there still."

"I should like to see that portrait. It might enable us to identify this man."

"Good gracious, father, you never imagine this young stranger to be the same man!" exclaimed Madam Journey, pale and aghast.

"Why, no; how could that possibly be? Do the dead rise again in this world, or does youth ever come back to the aged? My good daughter, compose your mind and collect your wits. Of course, you know what you suggested to be an impossibility?"

"Of course, I do. But oh, father, the name—the name and—the likeness! for, as I reflect, the memory of that old portrait returns to me, and its resemblance to this stranger grows upon me."

"This young man may possibly be a descendant of the other one. His child lived, you know?"

"Oh, yes."

"What ever became of him?"

"I do not know; if I ever heard, I have forgotten."

"Can you tell me nothing, then?"

"It was said that the Lady Berenice sent him away from the neighborhood under the charge of a Jesuit brother who was going to Louisiana. I heard no more than that; if I did, I have forgotten what. But oh, father!" exclaimed the old lady, suddenly clasping her hands.

"What now?" gently inquired the priest.

"That, after this long lapse of years there should be

met under this roof another Vane Vandeleur and another Berenice."

"Well, it is a curious coincidence—nothing more, though they are both uncommon names."

"Oh father! father! the first meeting was the beginning; the second may be the end. It looks as if the old curse were closing around us."

"The curse? My daughter, how often have I prayed you to put away that old superstition from your soul? No man nor woman has power to curse another. Only God has that power; and He spares us. But we curse ourselves with our sins and follies. That old malediction is but a family legend, as undeserving attention as any ghost story that ever was told to frighten children in the dark. Your faith in it is a superstition and a sin," said the priest, solemnly.

"Oh, but the curse clings—it clings!" exclaimed the old lady, clasping her hands with more passion and vehemence than any one would have suspected to belong to her nature—"it clings! it clings! See how it has followed us down from generation to generation, from that time to this. And now the circle is complete. It is closing around us to crush us out."

"Let it be forgotten. The remembrance of a prophecy often brings about its fulfillment. Let this be utterly forgotten. It lives now only in the memory of three old people—you, and myself, and another. We shall soon pass away, and with us all memory of that old tradition. While we live, let us not speak of it, believe in it, or even think about it. The advice I gave you in your youth, I reiterate now in your age."

"And have I not been guided by your advice? I received the story as an heirloom from my mother, as she had it from hers. But it went no farther. You bade me arrest it then—lock it in my own bosom and keep it there, that it might, perchance, die away. Well, I obeyed you, father. I kept the secret to myself. I keep it still. I never breathed a hint of it to my daughter, or my granddaughter, or to the child, Berenice; no, not even under the greatest temptations. Well, the secret stopped with me. But has the curse so stopped? No; but it has followed us down from generation to gener-

ation as before. It fell upon Hortensia, it fell upon Rosamond, it threatens Berenice. It clings, it clings, and now it is closing round to crush us!"

And here the old lady fell to weeping and moaning.

The priest watched her in silence for a while, and then said, very gravely:

"Mrs. Jernyngham, this is so unlike your usual excellent sense that I can in no way account for your emotion. But you said just now that you had hidden this secret in your bosom, in spite of the greatest temptation to disclose it. Will you tell me in what these greatest temptations consisted?"

"First, when Colonel John Dering came here as a suitor to my only daughter, I was tempted to tell the story and stop the marriage; but I remembered my promise to you, and refrained."

"And you were entirely right," said the priest.

"And you see what came of it?"

"That was no fault of yours. But what was the second temptation?"

"It was when Raphael Brooke appeared and asked the hand of my granddaughter, Rosamond. Again I was tempted to tell the story and stop the sacrifice; but again the memory of my pledge withheld me. And what were the consequences? The marriage went forward, and a few months afterward—— But let that pass. I cannot bear to speak of it. And there came a third temptation, greater than all that went before."

"And that?"

"Was when Rosamond's child was born, and the newly-widowed young mother said to me:

"'Grannam, we will call our fatherless little maiden Berenice, after our sainted ancestress, and so ward off from her all the ills of orphanage.'"

"What could I say to her? I did wish to tell her that this 'sainted ancestress' had been an awful sinner before ever she was a holy saint; but that her sins were not spoken of because they lay deeply out of sight, or revealed themselves but darkly in the curse that continued to cling to her race. And that her piety only was remembered in the monument she had erected to herself—the chapel of St. Rosalie. But again I was re-

strained by the remembrance of my promise. I could not tell her these truths, nor could she suspect their existence. So she named her child after Berenice—after the accursed."

"After the sainted. My daughter, the reputed sin of that lady is but a subject of tradition, while her unquestionable holiness is a matter of history. We have no sort of proof that she ever committed the crime or incurred the curse connected with her name; while all around us we have the monuments of her good and great works."

"Then if she never was guilty of that enormous sin, and if her descendants never were accursed for her sake, why is it—why is it, I ask you—that the fearful punishment of her crime is said to have imposed upon us has followed us all ever since her day? Has followed us for five generations?"

"I do not know," meekly replied the priest.

"No, Father Ignatius, you do not know. And you can neither deny the facts nor explain them."

"I do not deny them, nor pretend to explain them, except as a chain of remarkable coincidences."

"'Coincidence!' a most convenient word, my father. If a dream is fulfilled, it is a coincidence. If an event that is predicted occurs, it is a coincidence. And here is a curse that is said to have been laid upon our race, for the sin of an ancestress, and which has been literally carried out in every generation, and you call the whole set of facts a chain of coincidences. Father, you make me think of old Hecuba and her ghost."

The priest looked up inquiringly, and the lady went on:

"After she had recovered from typhoid fever, Hecuba was haunted nightly by a ghost, whose appearence she minutely described to me. I understood, or at least I thought I understood, the whole thing, so I assured her that her ghost was but an optical illusion. She answered:

"'Can't help what you call it, mist'ess. You may call it any name you like, but dar it was, and it scared me all but to death.' Now I do not care what you call the

family fate that follows us; here is is; and it makes me miserable."

"Because you believe in the curse. It is your faith in it that brings about its fulfillment."

"Father! father! Did Hortensia believe in it? Did Rosamond? Did either of them even know of it, or suspect it? Yet it was fulfilled in the lives of Hortensia and John Dering, and in those of Rosamond and Raphael Brooke. And now, and now, it threatens Berenice and this young stranger, Vane Vandeleur. In them it will be finally consummated. I know it, father. I know it, by the foreboding conjunction of those two names in this house, and their identity with those two other names. The curse will end where it began, and the circle of fate will be complete," said Madam Journey, with a shudder that shook her whole slight frame.

"Now, was ever such lamentable superstition found before in a civilized and Christian woman of the nineteenth century?" sighed the priest.

"Call my anxiety by what name you will, you know that it has a just foundation."

"What has brought all this question up just now?—the presence of this young stranger who bears the old name?"

"Of course it is; and cause enough to revive the old grief and horror. But that is not all, father: he is struck with Berenice, and she with him!"

"What! and they have been together but little more than twenty-four hours!" exclaimed the priest, in doubt.

"Yes; and they are smitten with each other."

"This should be looked to! Certainly, this should be looked to! Leaving his supposed ill-omened name out of the question, the society of an attractive young man, of whose character and position you know little or nothing, must be very objectionable for a young girl of Berenice's age and station," said Father Ignatius, very gravely.

"And the worst of it is that we are likely to have him here for an indefinite time. If the weather continues as cold as it is now, the creek will be frozen over to-night, and then goodness knows when that brig will be righted, and he will get away."

"You must in any case get rid of him," insisted Father Ignatius, deliberately.

"That is easy said; but how it is to be done A shipwrecked traveler, cast upon our coast? Why, father, he must be entertained and treated kindly, and made to feel at home, cost what it may in embarrassment. I do believe I would rather die outright than say or do anything to make such an one feel that he is not welcome and must leave."

"That is not necessary. This matter may be managed in a different manner. There are tactics in war. Something must be done. Let me think—I see. In compliment to these guests of yours, you may give a small dinner party; invite Major Hourie and his nephews, Mr. Dickson Storms and his ward, and——"

"Yourself, good father."

"No, no, not me; but my Brothers Bonhomme and Francis."

"And then, father?"

"These guests will make the acquaintance of this young stranger. They will press their hospitality upon him in such a manner that he can not well decline. Major Hourie will do so, and he never takes a denial. But should not Major Hourie succeed in bringing away your *bete noir*, I will so instruct Father Bonhomme that he shall not fail to bring him to us at St. Rosalie, where we will try to keep him."

"Oh, dear Father Ignatius, how good you are—how very good!"

The priest waved his hand.

"My daughter, such words to me who know myself to be so evil, are very painful. But to return. I will undertake in a few days to relieve you of your dangerous guest. In the meantime, look well to him and to your girl. Let them have no opportunity of talking soft nonsense together, or looking sentiment into each other's eyes. I will see you again to-morrow, and talk farther of this matter," said the priest, rising.

"Father, you are not going?"

"I must, my daughter. I have a sick woman on this side of the creek, to whom I must administer the con-

solations of the Church this morning. Good-day to you."

"But, father, stay! Our dinner will be ready at the usual hour. Pray remain to bless our meal."

"Many thanks; but it is quite impossible."

"At least let me give you a glass of wine and a slice of cake."

"Nay, the errand I go upon, precludes me from such indulgences. Many thanks all the same. And—*Benedicite*, my daughter," said the old man, as he placed his napless hat upon his head, buttoned his rusty coat about him, took his staff in his hand, and slowly left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

WITCHCRAFT.

Upon his hand she laid her own.
Light was the touch, but it thrilled to the bone.—BYRON.

One of Madam Journey's predictions was fulfilled almost immediately. As the day advanced, the weather grew colder and colder, and the night that followed was one of the coldest ever known in that latitude. Before morning, the creek was frozen over.

"Well, here we are, with our navigation closed until next March, I suppose!" exclaimed old Tom, as he joined the family circle that was gathered around the blazing fire in the ladies' sitting-room that morning, before breakfast.

"Well, captain, what odds? You are at home, or near it; your cargo is secured; and your vessel is safe where it lies. You have a holiday; that is all; make the most of it and enjoy yourself. Cold weather is the season for mirth and festivity," said Madam Journey, cheerily.

The presence of her guest, or at least that of the stranger, with the ill-omened name, really disturbed the old lady so much that she would have very much preferred their absence. But for all that, she liked them both personally, and under less formidable circumstances she would have enjoyed their company; and even now, having them before her, she could not do otherwise than press her hospitality upon them in terms that assured them of a sincere welcome.

"You are very good to us, Madam Journey, very good indeed, but that is no reason why we should trespass upon your kindness," returned old Storms.

"Trespass! You know it is no trespass. You know that here at Henniker, we are always very happy to have company staying with us to break the tedium of our lives. Come! I dare say you will find it very dull here; but we will do our best to amuse you. I shall send out to-day and ask a few of our neighbors to come and meet

you at dinner on Saturday. I think you may be pleased with our neighbors, Mr. Vandeleur. Captain Storms there can tell you something about them," said the old lady, kindly.

"About whom? Old Hourie, for instance?" inquired the captain.

"Yes, you may tell about him, for I shall invite him."

"Well, he's 'a fine old Southern gentleman, all of the olden time,' and a sort of cross between a French nobleman of the *ancien regime*, and an English fox-hunting squire of to-day. Major Hourie of Hourie Hall—which the natives have simplified to Old Hurrah, of Hurrah Hall. If he should take a fancy to you, he will give you some excellent sport."

"I shall certainly try to merit this grand seignor's good opinion," said Vane, with a little laugh.

"And, then, there are his two nephews—Ernest Blackistone and Clarence Fairlie, the sons of his two deceased sisters," continued the captain.

"Yes," added Madam Journey, "and as the old gentleman is a widower without children, these two young men will be his heirs."

"They are very fine boys," put in Mrs. Dering, "very fine, indeed, though perfect contrasts to each other. Young Blackistone—who, by the way, is the older of the two lads—is tall and slender, with a dark complexion and jet black hair, and black beard and black eyes. He is much given to field sports, like his uncle. Clarence Fairlie is of medium height; in form and feature as delicate, and in complexion as fair, as any young lady. He has a skin of dazzling clearness, with light blue eyes, and pale, amber hair."

"A little dandy—you won't like him; you'll prefer his brother, Mr. Vandeleur," laughed Mrs. Brooke.

"Well now, for my part, I think both the boys very fine young men, especially the little one, he is so affectionate and caressing, poor motherless darling! Either of them would be worthy even of your own little Halcyone, captain. And I couldn't give them higher praise than that—could I now, old friend? As for Halcyone, I tell everybody candidly that she is my beauty."

"Hal is a mischievous little monkey who torments my life and soul out of me," grumbled old Storms.

"Never mind, captain, the time is at hand when, in the usual course of nature, she will be privileged to torment some other man's life out of him, when probably she will leave you in peace," said Madam Journey.

"Umph, umph, umph!" grunted old Tom.

But, whether his grunts meant assent or dissent, he could not himself have told.

"And now please to walk in to breakfast," smiled Madam Journey, leading the way to the dining-room.

There, the sight of all his favorite dishes, smoking hot upon the table, speedily consoled Captain Storms for the misfortune of being icebound at Widowville.

When breakfast was over, Madam Journey wrote her invitations and sent forth her factotum, Euripides, warmly clothed, and mounted on a good stout horse, to deliver them. Later in the forenoon, old Storms, finding himself alone with the principal lady of the house, addressed her in these formidable terms:

"Madam, you must know how highly I appreciate your hospitality; but I cannot bring myself to abuse it by too lengthened a stay. I shall be glad to remain over Saturday, to meet the old friends you have kindly invited here. But on Monday, at farthest, I must find my way to my own old home. And with your good leave, and his consent, I shall take my passenger, Mr. Vandeleur, along with me."

"Well, well, captain, as you please. We will talk about that when Monday comes. 'Sufficient unto the day,' you know," laughed Madam Journey, as she hurried away upon household business.

Truly, if Captain Tom had not been encumbered with his passenger, or if the latter had borne any other than the very objectionable name by which he was called, Madam Journey would have taken great pleasure in the company of either, or both. Now, though for some reasons she really wished them gone, for others she hated to hear them talk of going. And this is not an unusual inconsistency of feeling.

Saturday came and ushered in a great snowstorm.

When the family circle at Widowville assembled in

the breakfast parlor, Mr. Vandeleur, looking out of the windows upon the deeply-whitened ground and the fast-falling snow, ventured this observation:

"Your friends will scarcely get here to-day, madam,"

"Why not?" curtly inquired the hostess.

Vandeleur raised his brows with an expression of surprise and silently waved his hand toward the windows.

"Oh! you mean the weather? Fiddle! If one of my friends were to stay in the house solely on account of weather, when there was any good reason for going out, I would cut his acquaintance. Weather, indeed! If I had an errand to a town twenty miles distant to-day, I'd jump on my horse and go and do it, weather or no weather! Come, take your seats. Our old-fashioned neighbors, when they are invited to dinner, always come early in the morning and stay all day. Some of them will be here by the time we get through breakfast," said Madam Journey, as she took her place at the head of her table.

Her words were again verified. While they were still lingering over the pleasant meal, there came the merry sound of sleigh bells, softened through the falling snow, and the next moment a dashing little equipage, driven by a mere child, flashed past the windows and drew up before the door.

"It is Halcyone!" exclaimed Berenice, eagerly rising.

"Yes, it is that little dare-devil, Hal, driving herself, as I live! She'll break her neck some of these days! Umph! umph! umph! umph! I christened her Halcyone because I had a sort of notion that it meant brooding peace! Umph! it ought to have meant brewing storms to have suited her!" growled old Tom, as he also arose from the table and followed the ladies who had hurried out into the hall to receive their guest.

The front door was opened just as the horses were reined up at the base of the terrace, and the young charioteer arose in her seat, made one spring from the sleigh to the stone steps, and alighted on them like a bird.

A very brilliant bird she looked, indeed, as she stood there a moment trimming her plumage—*i. e.*, pulling down her many-colored Scotch plaid dress, settling her sable furs, and adjusting her little, jaunty black velvet

cap, with its heron plume. She was a little bit of a creature, reminding one of a firefly, a humming bird, a paroquet, or, at the very biggest, a bird of paradise. She had bright brown hair, clustering around a fair, white forehead; she had clear, brilliant, dark gray eyes, fringed with curled black lashes, and overarched by slender, flexible black brows; she had a small, turned-up nose, full, red lips, and a little, pointed, protruding chin. Her face was not classic, not even regular, and certainly not beautiful in the usual acceptation of that word; but it was more than all these—it was arch, mocking, mischievous, and altogether bewitching.

CHAPTER VIII.

HALCYONE.

A dancing shape, an image gay
To haunt, to startle and waylay.—Wordsworth.

A willful elf, an uncle's child,
And half a pet and half a plague.—Anon.

Halcyone stood only a moment, trimming her gay plumage, and then she darted half way up the steps and into the open arms of old Tom, who ran down to meet her and clasped her to his bosom with quite an effusion of welcome.

"So, you wicked elf, you have driven those horses again! In a sleigh, too. And you have escaped with your neck, once more!" exclaimed old Storms, in a stern voice and with a terrible frown.

"So, you wicked old skipper, you have capsized your vessel again. In doubling Henniker's Point, too. And you have escaped with your life and the lives of your crew!" exclaimed Halcyone, in a severe tone and with a dark frown.

"Bosh! What did I tell you about driving those fast horses—in a sleigh, too?"

"Fiddle! What did I tell you about trying to double Henniker's Point—in foul weather, too?"

"Tut! I won't be put off in this way. I say you must not drive those horses again; they are dangerous."

"And I say you shall not double Henniker's Point again, for it is very dangerous. Why, look here, sir! as often as I have driven these horses, I have never upset my carriage yet. And every time you attempt to double Henniker's Point in foul weather you capsize your vessel," scolded Halcyone, shaking all her sunny curls.

"Why, you awful little——! How dare you say such things of me, when I never tried to double Henniker's Point in foul weather, in all my life, until that night," exclaimed old Storms, wrathfully.

"Well, and that very night you capsized your vessel. Don't that prove my words true? As often as you try to double Henniker's Point in foul weather you capsize your vessel. You have never failed to do it. You do it every time."

"Oh, you little villain, never mind; I'll pay you for it. But come; here are the ladies. Are you not going to speak to them?" inquired the captain, waving his hand upward toward the front door—which, standing wide open, revealed the group of ladies within, waiting for their young guest.

She flew up the steps and into the hall, and darted hither and thither, shaking hands, kissing, laughing, and chattering.

"Halcyone, my dear, let me introduce our guest, Mr. Vandeleur—Miss McAlpine," said Madam Journey.

Vane Vandeleur bowed deeply, with the grave, sweet courtesy of his nature; but Halcyone McAlpine held out her hand frankly, saying:

"I am very glad to know you, Mr. Vandeleur. Of course I have heard all about the wreck, and so I can sincerely congratulate you on your escape."

"Thanks," said Vane; "but I do not think the danger was very great. A ducking was our only misfortune, and a chance of taking cold our most serious peril."

"Oh yes, I know; I have doubled Henniker's Point myself before now, though not, indeed, in foul weather, and I know what it is—oh, here you are," she broke off and exclaimed as Tom joined the group—"here you are, just in time to hear me tell Mr. Vandeleur that I will never trust you to navigate your vessel alone again. I will go with you next time to take care of you and your brig."

"Mr. Vandeleur, do you hear this girl? And do you know that her words are no idle boast? She's a young girl, sir, but she's an old salt. She was brought up on shipboard, sir. The ship was her only home from the time she was two years old until she was seventeen. The deck was her cradle, the sails her curtains, the winds her rockers. Why, sir, besides coasting with me all along the bay and its tributaries, she has been four times

to the West Indies with me and twice to the East. What do you think of that?"

"That the young lady must be a good sailor by this time," replied Vandeleur, with a smile and a bow.

"A good sailor? I believe you. The brig was her nursery in infancy, and her schoolroom in girlhood. She can navigate the vessel better than anybody on board except myself, and old Jack, and she can do it as well as we can."

"Come now, Captain Gulliver, that will do. Relate as many marvelous adventures as you please, but don't make me the heroine of any of them," exclaimed Halcyone, saucily.

While they talked, they were walking slowly up the hall. When they reached the foot of the staircase, Berenice came forward and invited Halcyone to go upstairs to lay off her wrappings. With a bow and a laugh, the girl left her late companions and followed Berenice to a bedchamber in the upper story.

Meanwhile the other guests began to arrive.

A great, heavy, old family carriage came lumbering slowly up to the house; and from it descended Major Hourie and his two nephews.

Major Hourie was a tall, spare, stately old gentleman, of about seventy years. He had fine aquiline features; bright, gentle, dark-blue eyes; thin, iron-gray hair, and a gray mustache; his air and manners were replete with dignity and courtesy. He was dressed with care and taste. He was—as had been said of him—a gentleman of the old school—a *grand seigneur* of the *ancienne noblesse*.

He advanced to greet his hostess with his usual suave and stately grace.

Madam Journey, who always received her guests at her drawing-room door, welcomed him very cordially. She then presented:

"Mr. Vandeleur—Major Hourie."

And the two gentlemen bowed simultaneously; and then the major held out his hand, with a smile, saying:

"I suppose I ought to condole with you upon your misfortune in being cast upon our coast here, but really I feel more inclined to congratulate myself and friends

on the acquisition of so agreeable an addition to our social circle."

"That means, 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody good,'" put in the captain.

"Many thanks," returned Vandeleur; "to me certainly the shipwreck, if you will give the accident so grave a name, is a subject for unmixed congratulation. I am but an idle wanderer around the world, with nothing about me very valuable to lose—not even my life; so, being thrown ashore here, I only find 'my lines cast in very pleasant places.'"

"We will endeavor to make you think so, at least," smiled Major Hourie—"but here are my nephews, and they must make your acquaintance," he added, as the two young men, who had lingered behind for a few moments, to give some directions to their coachman, now joined him.

He presented them in due form:

"Mr. Vandeleur—my nephew, Mr. Blackistone—my second nephew, Mr. Fairlie."

There was more bowing, but no more shaking of hands—that hand-shaking, upon a first introduction, being a relic of old-school manners, lingering only with such old-fashioned folks as Madam Journey and Major Hourie.

There was a frankness about the manners of both these young men—so dissimilar in every other respect—that made them very attractive to our melancholy stranger. They entered with him eagerly into their subjects of rural interest—the fox hunting, the waterfowl shooting, the skating, now that the creek was closed, and the fine sleighing there would be now that the frozen ground was so deeply covered with snow.

"After all that can be said in favor of blooming summer, I think I like the winter best—there is so much more enjoyment of life," said young Blackistone.

"There is better sport. I would like to show you some up there at Hourie Hall. And since you give yourself out to be an ideal traveler around the world, I should be delighted if you could in charity bestow some of your idleness upon us," added Major Hourie, earnestly, as he turned to Vandeleur.

"You are too kind. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to avail myself of your invitation, should a favorable opportunity occur. But the length of my stay here is really very uncertain. I may leave at any hour. I must leave within a few days," bowed Vandeleur.

And Madam Journey, overhearing these words, felt both surprised and relieved. This young stranger with the ill-omened name talked of going away almost immediately; therefore he could have no serious thought of staying and paying his court to the "Princess Royal" of the house. It was nothing to the purpose that she knew he could not get away, even if he wished to do so; it was enough that he intended it.

So Madam Journey thought now that she might venture to be as kind as she really wished to be.

"You 'may' leave us at any hour, may you, Mr. Vandeleur? You 'must' leave us within a few days, must you? Not that you know of, my dear young gentleman. In the first place, the mail-coach from Henniker has stopped running on account of the bad roads, and in the second place the mail boat has stopped running because navigation is closed for the winter. So how are you to get off?" triumphantly demanded Madam Journey.

"I should be only too happy with any sort of fair excuse to trespass a little longer on the kindness of such good friends; but I fear that no such excuse will be found for me, even though steamboats and stagecoaches stop running, while the roads are still practicable for horsemen or foot-passengers," replied Vane, pleasantly.

"Ah, well. You are tired of us, and who can wonder that you should weary of three old women and a little girl?" inquired the old lady, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Madam, that is very hard. He knows not what to reply to you," said Major Hourie, smiling at the dismayed countenance of Vandeleur.

But Vane was not going to permit himself to be vanquished in that way. He looked inquiringly from one to the other, and then said pleasantly.

"I beg pardon! I did not quite understand you, madam."

"I said," repeated the old lady, sharply, "that it was no wonder you should weary of three old women and a little girl."

"But, madam, I have not had the opportunity—I have seen no such."

"No? what do you call us then?"

Vandeleur accepted this challenge and answered it boldly:

"I call you, if you will pardon the liberty, three very charming gentlewomen and one beautiful maiden."

"Tut, tut, tut, Mr. Vandeleur, you are an egregious flatterer," exclaimed Madam Journey, more offended than pleased, though she had really, even if unintentionally, fished for that fulsome compliment.

"He a flatterer! Not a bit of it, madam. He is a truth-teller; only he doesn't tell the truth with half enthusiasm enough!" exclaimed Captain Storms, coming to the rescue.

At the same moment the door was opened and two more visitors were announced.

"The Reberent Father Bonhomme. The Reberent Father Francis Carroll," said Euripides, as with great ceremony he ushered the priests into the drawing-room.

Father Bonhomme was a short, fat, round little body, with a fair, full, rosy face, and gray hair, blue eyes and white teeth. He did all the pleasant jobs in the parish—officiated at all the weddings, christenings, and other festivals. Besides which it was said that penitents who confessed to Father Bonhomme had a very easy time of it. For all these things Father Bonhomme was very popular in his district and very much beloved by his children—and by none more so than by the fair women of Henniker. That he heartily returned all this affection it was only necessary to look into his happy face to feel assured.

Father Francis Carroll—or Father Francis, as he was usually called—was of another species of the *genus homo*. He was tall and spare even to emaciation, with a fine, thin face, to which the broad forehead, wasted cheeks and pointed chin gave an almost triangular shape; he had sunny auburn hair and clear brown eyes, full of

thought, feeling and fire. He did all the hardest work of the altar and the faithful. He served the earliest masses at midnight or at daybreak. He preached the Sunday sermons. He visited all the sick and buried all the dead. He went out to these duties at all hours of the day or night, and in all weathers. He sat longest in the confessional, listening to the peccadillos of his parishioners—and woe betide the hypocrite, the self-deceiver, the prevaricator, the trafficker in Heaven's pardons, that knelt at the confession chair occupied by Father Francis Carroll; for they would get no mercy there. He spared no sinner, not even himself—least of all himself. Father Francis was not popular in his parish, or beloved by any of his parishioners; except, perhaps, by a few romantic young ladies, who are always interested in the melancholy and the mysterious; for it was whispered that this austere priest had been driven into the church by some deep sorrow or some great remorse, if not by both. Yet austere as Father Francis was at all times, he still had a smile and a pleasant word of greeting for his friends on such occasions as these.

As they went up the room Madam Journey came forward to meet them. She shook hands cordially with Father Bonhomme; asking him how he felt, and hoping that he was well; and so she drew him on to the warmest seat by the chimney side.

Father Francis she received with more quietness and respect; for the truth was that Madam Journey was a little afraid of this severe devotee.

She presented Mr. Vandeleur to both, however; and by both the young stranger was warmly welcomed.

"You will probably be icebound here for some time yet. If so, you must make us a visit at our little house of St. Rosalie, and see how we poor priests live when we are at home. We have not a very extensive establishment; but we have always 'a hole in the wall for a prophet,' or a pilgrim either," said Father Bonhomme, heartily.

"Many thanks. You are very good. All are so kind to us here, that I really count our capsize as a blessing," answered Vandeleur, smiling.

"Most of our so-called calamities are blessings if we could view them aright," said Father Francis.

Vandelcur bowed in silence.

But Madam Journey became fidgety—she was afraid the priest was going to preach. Now Madam Journey was too systematic to like anything out of its place, and least of all, did she like preaching out of the pulpit. She got up and poked the fire, and drew the window curtains aside, and walked restlessly about the room. Luckily she was relieved of her uneasiness by the arrival of still two other of her expected guests, as the door was again opened and old You Rip announced:

"Mr. Dickson Storms and Mr. Harry Storms."

Mr. Dickson Storms was the counterpart of his brother. He was as tall and as big, with the same bullet head, bull neck, gray beard and red face, the same broad shoulders, deep chest, and massive limbs that distinguished "the bold sailor of the seas."

Harry Storms as closely resembled his father and his uncle as any young man could resemble two old ones. Indeed, the family form and features were well kept up in the house of Storms. Harry was a tall, stout, finely formed young man, with regular features, a fair, fresh complexion, amber hair, and blue eyes, and a frank and joyous look and manner, that won him favor in all circles.

The newcomers had scarcely time to bow acknowledgments of their hostess' warm welcome before they were rushed upon by old Tom, who, seizing a hand of each, exclaimed:

"My dear Dick! my dear Harry! how glad I am to see you both! I say, Madam Journey, why is your dinner a very democratic republican, leveling sort of an assemblage? You give it up? Because you have 'Tom, Dick and Harry' here! Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho!" roared the old man, who was always sure of one laugh to his jokes, because he provided it himself.

"But now tell me, both of you, why did you let that imp Hal McAlpine come flying over the country in that lightning sleigh, with those wild horses, too?" gravely demanded the captain.

"Why did we let her? That's a good one! As if any

one could ever prevent Hal from doing as she pleases! The matter was discussed last night. She wanted that we should all come in the sleigh. I told her no; that we would get up the old family carryall and harness a pair of strong draught horses to it, to drive her over these dreadful roads. And so we should have done, if she hadn't given us the slip, and started off in the sleigh before we were out of bed," said Mr. Dickson Storms, apologetically.

"Before you were out of bed! On my word, your excuse is worse than the original offense!" growled old Tom.

"Come, come, stow all that, and introduce us to your young friend there," said Mr. Dickson.

"All right. Mr. Vandeleur, this is my brother Dickson, and this is my son Harry. When we are all together we are the veritable 'Tom, Dick and Harry,' of whom you have heard so much mention made. For instance, at a very much mixed party you ask, 'Who were there?' 'Oh, Tom, Dick and Harry,' you are told very contemptuously. 'Who will be allowed to vote under the new free suffrage bill?' 'Oh, Tom, Dick and Harry.' 'Who has been sent to Congress?' 'Tom, Dick and Harry.' Now, here we are, the identical three!"

Thus the old seaman rattled on, while his brother and his son were shaking hands with the stranger.

And after this they walked to the upper end of the room to pay their respects to the two priests, who were standing at a table there, looking over some prints.

In a few moments the door opened again, and Mrs. Dering, Mrs. Brooke, Berenice and Halcyone entered the room. And there were more cordial greetings, and more eager talk and gay laughter before every one got seated and settled.

The small company was now all assembled, and grouped at pleasure about the comfortable, long drawing-room. Father Bonhomme attached himself to Madam Journey, and their talk was about a new sauce for game, the recipe for which the priest promised to send to the old lady.

Major Hourie devoted himself to the entertainment of Mrs. Dering, and their conversation turned upon the

lamentable decay of manners and the leveling tendencies of the times in general.

But around Mrs. Brooke's little worktable quite a group was assembled—Captain Storms, Mr. Dickson, Ernest Blackistone and Father Francis. And she held them all in lively chat and merry laughter.

Perched upon the end of the piano, with her toes just touching the music stool, sat Halcyone—a too apparent illustration of Mrs. Dering's lecture on the decline of manners. But if any friend had hinted to the little McAlpine that her position was unladylike, she would have answered—that being so little herself, she required a high seat, as a baby requires a high chair, to be upon a level with other people and to see and be seen at all.

At any rate, there she sat, like a bird on a twig. Standing near her were the two nephews of Major Hourie. And almost any one might have seen at a glance that these young cousins were bitter rivals for the favor of the bewitching little Halcyone.

Ernest Blackistone stood with his elbow resting on the top of the piano, and his head bowed upon his hand. His eyes were fixed upon the face of Halcyone, and his whole dark, picturesque countenance, was eloquent with the feeling that no thought of time or place had power to prevent him from betraying.

He might gaze in her witching face at will, for Halcyone was, apparently, ignoring his presence, and giving all her attention to his cousin, the fair-haired Clarence, who sat at her feet, lifting adoring blue eyes to her face, and listening to her gay description of her mad sleigh-ride of ten miles through the storm that morning.

At a short distance from them, Major Hourie, though yielding a polite attention to Mrs. Dering's harangue, was yet casting furtive glances of disturbance and disapprobation toward his nephews, and the object of their idolary, for be it known that brilliant little Halcyone was not considered a desirable match by any of the parents or guardians around who had sons or wards to marry.

Not that anything was ever said against Halcyone—and most certainly not that anything was ever known against her. In fact, it was not what was known, but

what was unknown of her history, that injured her in the estimation of the good people of the neighborhood.

No one could tell who she really was.

She was neither the daughter, niece, nor cousin of old Storms. She was of no kin to him whatever. Some sixteen years before, she had been picked up from a wreck (the only one of all the passengers and crew that was saved), by Captain Storms. He was then outward bound to the East Indies. He had no choice but to take the child with him.

Who or what she was, beyond being a very pretty little girl-baby, neither he nor any one else knew. Among the clothing that she had on when she was picked up, the only clew to her identity was the initials—H. McAlpine. The H. might have stood for Helen or Harriet, or any other name beginning with that letter.

But because the weather, which had been very tempestuous before the arrival of the child, fell calm as soon as she was received on deck, and continued fair to the end of the voyage, old Storms took it into his head to call her Halcyone.

He carried her to Calcutta and brought her back, making in both trips a voyage of nearly eighteen months in length of time. And from that time she had been the companion of his voyage, the consolation of all his cares, and the delight of his old age. He had taught her to read and to write; and she had taught herself everything else that was required for a fair average education. The neighbors called her fast, only, because more than half her life was passed on shipboard; and because, when on shore, she would fish, shoot, skate, break in wild colts and follow the fox-hounds with the best and bravest. So, you see, neither in a personal nor social point of view could this bewitching little Halcyone be esteemed a desirable match for any of the young men of the country.

And thus even the courtly and gracious Major Hourie regarded his nephews' devotion to her with disapprobation and anxiety.

But there was still another group in this drawing-room that deserves attention. Seated apart, at a table strewn with fine engravings, was Berenice Brooke. Her dress of rich ruby-colored silk, with its trimmings of fine old

point lace, well became the beauty of her lustrous, black ringlets, and of her dark, rich, bright face. She was bending over a picture that she held in her hands.

And two gentlemen, evidently rival aspirants to her favors, were bending over her.

One was Vane Vandeleur, who stood at her right hand, gazing with her on the picture, and murmuring his art-criticisms in such love-tuned tones as made every syllable an expression of tenderness and devotion.

The other was Henry Storms, who stood over her, with his muscular arms folded, his great chest heaving, and his fair face flushed, with the passion of love and the madness of jealousy, which he did not venture to reveal, yet could not entirely repress.

On this group, also, anxious and rebuking glances were cast. Old Captain Storms watched his son in wrath and trouble. Old Tom had even a greater horror of his son's marrying the beautiful and wealthy heiress of Henniker than Major Hourie had of his nephews wedding the penniless foundling of the wreck.

And Captain Storms would have very gladly broken up these groups, only, honest old sailor that he was, he knew not how to do it, except in the most direct manner, and he was quite as incapable of rudeness as he was of *finesse*. So he could only watch his boy and sigh.

Major Hourie, on the other hand, was an accomplished gentleman, diplomatic and self-possessed. So, when the flirtation between Clarence and Halcyone had gone on as long as he thought safe, he just stooped to the ear of Mrs. Dering and inquired:

"May I ask a favor of you, madam?"

"Certainly—a thousand, if you like."

"Thanks. That is a wide margin. Will you be so kind as to ask our young friend there to give us one of her delicious songs?"

Mrs. Dering looked up quickly and caught his eye, and caught his meaning, too, and smiled assent as she turned to Halcyone, and said:

"Miss McAlpine, my love, will you favor us with one of your fine, exhilarating sea songs? We are dull here, and the gentlemen very much wish to hear you."

"Yes, I'll do my best, Mrs. Dering," said Halcyone.

Then, turning her back to her fair-haired boy lover, she wound up her yarn of the sleighride by saying: "And after all, though I got here quite safe, my captain there must scold me. However, he had just capsized the *Carrier* below here, and didn't I turn the tables on him for that—— Yes, Mrs. Dering, I'm coming now," added Halcyone, as she jumped down from her high perch, and pulled the music stool to its proper place and put it to its proper use.

Major Hourie's diplomacy broke up more than one group. No sooner had Halcyone settled herself in her seat than she called to young Storms:

"Come here, Harry, and help me to sing 'Life on the Ocean Wave.' They want an inspiring sea song, and that is the finest one I know. But you must help me."

Young Storms changed color at the thought of leaving Vane Vandeleur *tête-à-tête* with Berenice Brooke. Though a polite and good-tempered young fellow, he even hesitated to obey until Berenice Brooke, who had probably been wearied with his long attendance, said:

"Don't you see that Halcyone is waiting for you, Mr. Storms?"

With an impatient gesture that he could not entirely restrain, he exclaimed:

"Of course I must obey you, Miss Brooke."

And bowed and left her.

"That's a good boy. I know you didn't like to leave her, but I wanted you, you see, so you couldn't help yourself. Bear it like a man!" was the mockery with which Halcyone greeted him when he came to her side.

At first Master Harry was sulky; but very soon the spirit of the song came upon him, and he rolled forth its rousing notes with as much delight to himself as to his hearers.

"As a bird sings," so sang Halcyone. She knew nothing whatever of the art or science of music. She had taught herself as Blind Tom taught himself—by ear alone. She had a perfect ear and a delicious voice—a clear, pure, soprano voice—light, fresh, elastic, free, joyous, soaring as a lark's wings in the morning sunlight.

The old captain, now that the objectionable group was broken up, felt at liberty to enjoy the singing of his

"bird," as he often called Halcyone. He was very well satisfied that his son should be with her. He would have been quite willing to have given them to each other forever. He loved his little foundling of the wreck so well that it was hard to say whether he loved his only son any better. And he was very proud of her musical gifts, too.

"Oh, if I could only send her to Italy to be trained! If she can do these things so surpassingly well now, what could she not do if she were educated in the art?" he sighed, addressing Mrs. Brooke.

"She would distinguish herself, certainly," smilingly assented the lady.

"Do you know I fancy that the famous Jenny Lind, before she was caught and trained, was just such a free, joyous, untutored songbird of nature? And I think if our lark could be taught, she, too, would have a great success," said the captain.

And then, as if still more anxious to enjoy her delicious strains than to compliment them, the old man turned and gave his undivided attention to the singer.

By this time, also, the company had left all other occupations to listen to Halcyone.

She had an untiring voice. She sang in succession several inspiring songs—sea songs, hunting songs, battle songs—all of equally wild, jubilant, exhilarating spirit; and Harry seconded her well in all.

At length she arose from the piano—not in weariness even then, but rather in bashfulness at having sat there so long. And though her delighted audience would willingly have persuaded her to continue the rare entertainment, she shook all her sunny curls and smiled denial; and to the discomfiture of Major Hourie, she went and sat down on the sofa beside Clarence Fairlie, and said:

"Now, Clary, you must tell me about that coon hunt by moonlight you were mentioning. And mind, the next time you go out you must let me know beforehand, so that I may go too."

There was an interval filled up with general conversation, and then Mrs. Dering, still following up the hint of Major Hourie, turned to Miss Brooke, and said:

"Berry, my love, can you give our friends some of their favorite airs from the opera?"

The young lady bowed in assent, and arose and went and seated herself at the piano, closely followed by Vane Vandeleur, who stood behind her chair, ready to turn over her music.

The style of Berenice Brooke's singing was a perfect contrast to that of Hal McAlpine. The voice of Berenice was full, deep, rich contralto. It was also carefully cultivated. She sang some of the most impassioned songs from "Norma," "Tannhäuser," the "Huguenots," and other celebrated operas. If Hal McAlpine's inspiring notes had aroused her hearers to the highest pitch of exhilaration, Berenice Brooke's impassioned strains thrilled and subdued them with profound emotion. There was no applause, no word of praise, scarcely a breath was drawn in the room.

Vane Vandeleur hung over the singer, entranced with her, oblivious of every one else. If he had never loved before, he loved to madness now. As, at length, when she quietly arose from the instrument, he took her hand to lead her to a seat, he whispered eagerly, earnestly, vehemently, as if the words broke from the fullness of an overcharged heart;

"Oh, beautiful! most beautiful! I love you! I love you unto death!"

He felt her hand tremble in his clasp; he saw her cheek flame under his gaze; but the hand was not withdrawn, nor the cheek averted.

They seated themselves at the booktable, and seemed to be engaged with the volumes and pictures spread before them. Whether Vane Vandeleur would have ventured to follow up the declaration of love that had burst so impetuously from his lips, it would be hard to tell, for scarcely were they seated when Harry Storms, jealous, wretched and defiant, joined them there.

Meantime, on one of the sofas sat Halcyone, talking to the two cousins, Ernest Blackistone and Clarence Fairlie.

Thus, to the great annoyance of their elders, the young people had resolved themselves into the very same groups which they had formed when the music broke them up.

At length, much to the satisfaction of Major Hourie

and Captain Storms, dinner was announced. But, although the objectionable groups were thus broken up, yet the parties that composed them paired off together in the most provoking manner, and so marched to the dining-room.

Father Bonhomme led the way with Madam Journey; Major Hourie followed with Mrs. Dering; Ernest Blackistone gave his arm to Halycone, and Vane Vandeleur brought up the rear with Berenice Brooke.

Father Francis, Mr. Dickson Storms, Clarence Fairlie and Harry Storms, being left to themselves, came in singly and disconsolately, like the disreputable stragglers behind a marching army. They took their places at the table very much in the order in which they had come in—Madam Journey at the head of the table with Father Bonhomme on her right; each gentleman beside the lady he had escorted; and those who had entered singly, grouped near the foot.

But the luxuriousness of the feast spread before them should have consoled the most discontented for any unavoidable mortification. There were soups, fish and oysters; joints, both boiled and roasted; poultry and game, vegetables and fruits, custards and jellies, sweetmeats and ices, nuts and wines.

And to do them justice, the guests, with one exception, fully appreciated the good things set before them. That one exception was Father Francis, who, amid the luscious variety of the table, still confined himself to one dish at dinner, and one fruit at dessert.

In amusing contrast to the abstemious priest was hearty old Captain Storms, who ate of everything that was set before him, praising all the dishes, and finding each in its turn better than all the rest.

Then there was Major Hourie, whose dainty taste only selected the most *recherché* of the dishes.

But as both gourmand and epicurean loved to sit late at the feast, the dinner was much prolonged.

At length, however, the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, where they were soon followed by the gentlemen.

Lights were brought in, and tea and coffee served. And then it would have been in due order for the com-

many to take leave, had not the weather grown worse and worse with the approach of night.

Major Hourie went to the window, and looked out anxiously.

The snow was falling faster than ever, and the wind, that had arisen with the going down of the sun, was now blowing furiously and drifting the snow, "mountains high."

"The whole face of the country is being changed, if one could see it," said the major to the old seaman, who had followed him, and now stood by his side contemplating the wintry scene without.

"Yes," said the latter, "the hills are being leveled and the valleys filled up, and all the landmarks obliterated."

"Travel seems impossible to-night," sighed the major.

"Travel is impossible, not only for to-night, but for to-morrow," answered the captain.

"It is quite useless your standing staring out of that window, gentlemen," laughed Madam Journey, "the weather is not going to improve by being watched. And it is quite out of the question for you to think of turning out in such a terrible storm. Resign yourselves to circumstances and bear the disappointment with what fortitude you can muster."

"I turn from this dark, tempestuous view without—which is all the more awful for being so dimly seen—and I look upon this glowing fire of great oak logs and this bright room with its fair occupants, and I feel that I can resign myself to circumstances with the utmost philosophy, and bear my fate wtih the greatest fortitude," said the major, bowing to the old lady.

"That is a very pretty speech, major, and you are very good-natured to make it."

"Thanks. But what I greatly fear is, that we are trespassing most unwarrantably on your kindness."

"Now, major, you know that you are talking the greatest nonsense. You know very well that we lonely old women are delighted at the storm that detains you here, and gives us so much the more of your pleasant company; and we don't even care at what inconvenience to yourself, so selfish are we," said Madam Journey.

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed the major, deprecatingly.

"I tell you what, ma'am," put in old Storms, "this house is a perfect mantrap. When a poor fellow once gets in, it is next to an impossibility for him ever to get out. For not only has he the strong attractions of its charming inmates to bind and to hold him, but the very weather itself shuts him in."

"Poor old gentleman! What a hard time you have! But come, we will try to console you. We will try a game of whist. I know you like that old-fashioned pastime. You and I will play against Major Hourie and my daughter, and we will beat them out of their senses," said the old lady, touching the bell.

You-Rip answered the call.

"Set out the whist-table, and bring the cards," said the mistress.

The old man obeyed, and then went to the windows to close the shutters.

"Let them alone," said Madam Journey. "You know very well that I never have the shutters closed until bedtime. What do you mean?"

"The night is so bad, ma'am, one of the worstest nights I ever knowed in all my life," expostulated the man.

"Why, that is the greater cause for the shutters being left open. Suppose some poor soul should be out in this storm. How would he ever be able to find his way to the house, unless he could see the light? I'm astonished at your dullness, You-Rip," snapped Madam Journey.

"You see, sir, she don't never take a consideration on to it, as the more stragglers is druv in here by the storm the more fires I shall have to kindle upstairs, and the more wet clothes to change and dry," whispered You-Rip, confidentially, to his old friend, Captain Storms, as he passed him on his way from the window.

"Grandmamma always has the windows left open until bedtime. She says the lighted windows cheer the lonely passengers on the road at night in all weathers, and in storms they serve to guide them to a shelter," said Berenice to Vane, who was still in attendance upon her.

"I have observed that she does so. I think it very thoughtful and kind of her," answered Mr. Vandeleur.

"Oh, but she makes no merit of it," laughed Berenice;

"it costs nothing. Indeed, I often wonder so wise and cheap a benefaction is not oftener done."

"Why, yes! What a festive appearance it would give, even to the streets of a city, if the window shutters were left open at night, so that the light of happy homes could shine out upon the wayfarer! Indeed, I think it would have a fine moral effect," said Vandeleur. Then, lowering his voice, he added: "If ever I should be so happy as to have a home of my own——"

"Mr. Vandeleur, excuse Berenice, if you please. Berenice, my love, here is Father Bonhomme would like a game of chess with you!" exclaimed Madam Journey, breaking ruthlessly into the *tête-à-tête*.

There was no remedy for Vane's annoyance. The will of the lady and the priest was omnipotent. With a smile and a bow to her companion, Miss Brooke arose and went to the little stand, where Father Bonhomme had already seated himself before the chessboard.

Madam Journey had her whist party made up as she had planned it—she and Captain Storms playing against Mrs. Dering and Major Hourie.

Then Mrs. Brooke called all the other members of the company together for a round game of forfeits. And thus, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, they amused themselves until Euripides made his appearance with the bedroom candles.

CHAPTER IX.

FATE.

On what strange grounds we build our hopes and fears;
Man's life is all a mist, and in the dark
Our fortunes meet us.—DRYDEN.

The guests assembled at Widowville were snowbound there for several days.

On Monday morning the day was clear, bright, still and sharp. The snow was frozen hard in drifts, so that there were hills and dells where they had never been seen before. The forest trees were sheathed in ice and bore icicles, instead of leaves. And the whole landscape was transfigured to a fairyland of crystal, flashing in the rays of a splendid morning sun.

"We are crowding these ladies out of house and home. We must get some of the young men away to-day at any rate," said Major Hourie, as he met Captain Storms alone in the parlor that morning.

"Well, I am going home to-day, and I am going to take my gentleman passenger along with me. I shall use the sleigh, which will skim very well over the frozen surface of this snow, drifted or not. I shall only require the sleigh for a few hours, and you shall be welcome to the use of it for the rest of the day. And what is more, you may choose your own time. You may take the sleigh this morning and send it back to me for the afternoon, or you may let me go home first and then dispatch it to you," said Captain Storms, cordially.

"No; it must be as you please. 'Beggars may not be choosers,'" smiled Major Hourie.

After a little more of this friendly dispute, Captain Storms said:

"Well, I will see what my passenger has to say about it. Vandeleur ought to have a voice in the matter. And as there is no time to lose, I will go and find him now."

"There he is, out in front of the house," observed Major Hourie.

Captain Storms took his hat and walked out upon the terrace, where he found Vane wrapped in his shawl and pacing thoughtfully to and fro.

"Vandeleur," said the captain, joining him and speaking abruptly, "we have trespassed on the hospitality of these ladies quite long enough. So I am going home to-day, and, of course, you are going with me as you promised. But what I wish to know is whether you would prefer to go this morning or to wait until the afternoon. It does not make the slightest difference to me, so that I reach home some time to-day. So it is for you to decide."

While the old man spoke, the younger one was gazing at him with his large dark eyes full of surprise and even consternation.

"So soon—I had no idea you were going so soon!" he exclaimed, in dismay.

"So soon? Why, we have been here long enough to have worn out our welcome, had it been any other place but Widowville. Yes, my friend, we go to-day. But the hour of departure rests with yourself," insisted old Tom.

"Then, if we must leave Henniker to-day, let it be at as late an hour as is practicable."

"Then that will be about three o'clock in the afternoon; for it will take us from that hour until night to reach home. Will that suit your book?"

"It must, I suppose," answered Vane, resignedly, "but I must—I really must have an interview with Mrs. Brooke before that," he added, earnestly, although almost inaudibly.

"Ah-ha!" said the captain, archly, "does the wind set in that direction? But it will be of no use. What did I tell you, my young friend? But come in. I see, through the windows, that they are all down and ready for breakfast."

They entered the house in time to escape Madam Journey's rebuke.

Immediately after the morning meal was over, as they were all leaving the breakfast-room, Vane Vandeleur passed up to the side of Mrs. Brooke, and said, in a low voice:

"I would like very much to see you alone for a few moments."

Rosamond Brooke looked up at him in surprise, not less at the words than at the air of ill-repressed emotion with which they were spoken.

"Certainly," she said; "will you walk into the drawing-room? There is a fire there, but no one enters it at this hour of the morning, and so we shall be uninterrupted."

And so she led the way into the drawing-room, closed the door, sat down near the fire, and invited him to be seated.

He placed himself as near her as delicacy and courtesy would permit, but so great was his agitation that, had he been some years older, or she younger, Rosamond Brooke might have been led to believe that he was about to make a declaration of love for herself.

"Madam," he began, as the color flashed and faded over his pale, dark face, "you heard Captain Storms announce his intention of departing this afternoon?"

"I heard him say he was going—yes."

"And I go with him."

"You do? You leave us so suddenly? I am very sorry," said Mrs. Brooke, kindly.

"Madam, I cannot leave you without——"

"Well, without what?" inquired Mrs. Brooke, smiling encouragingly, after she had vainly waited some minutes for the agitated young man to finish his sentence.

Standing a little behind her chair, with his hand upon its top, he poured forth the story of his love; his tongue once being loosened, he spoke with all the earnestness and impetuosity of his soul.

"I could not leave you, madam," he said, "without telling you how deeply, how devotedly I love your beautiful daughter. Yes! I see that you are surprised and displeased. I feel that it is natural you should be both astonished and indignant, not indeed at my loving her whom all must love, but at my presumption in making this declaration. I know that it must seem to you impertinent, ungrateful, and even treacherous, that I, apparently a mere waif of the world, wrecked upon your coast and kindly received and cared for in your house,

should so far forget myself and all I owe to you, as to aspire to the hand of your fair and only daughter. But, madam, I hope soon to convince you that, in character, position and this world's wealth, I am not quite unworthy of the boon I crave. I have written to New Orleans for my credentials. I shall remain in this neighborhood until they arrive, and then lay them before you, when I hope you will bless me with your sanction of my suit. And in the meantime I beseech you——"

"Stop a moment," exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, who had been utterly bewildered by the suddenness and vehemence of this declaration. "Let me get my breath, if you please. Now tell me, have you said anything to Berenice about this?"

"Madam, I have," answered Vane, in a low voice.

"That was very wrong, Mr. Vandeleur!" exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, in a tone of displeasure.

Vane bowed deeply.

"I know it, madam, and I crave your forgiveness; but I did no deliberate wrong at worst. I had not intended to express my feelings to Miss Brooke until I should have first gained your permission to do so. I had not even purposed to ask that permission until I could have laid before you such credentials as should have satisfied even your very justifiable doubts. I wrote for these credentials and waited for them. I should have still waited to receive them before speaking on this subject, either to you or to your lovely daughter, had I not——" He paused for a moment, and then in a very low tone resumed—"had I not in an hour of madness been surprised into uttering words to Miss Brooke that cannot now be recalled. I hope I have not sinned beyond the possibility of pardon."

"Will you be good enough to tell me how Berenice received those very impulsive and most indiscreet words?"

"Without displeasure, I trust."

The face, the eye, the voice, were all too much for Rosamond Brooke's firmness.

"We all here like you very much, personally, Mr. Vandeleur," she said, "but it is impossible—quite impossible. Think no more of Berenice. I can only advise you to forget her."

"But hear me yet!" he cried. "You were so kind as to say that I am not personally displeasing to you. If I prove that my reputation is unblemished among my fellow men, will you then give a more favorable consideration to my suit?"

"Mr. Vandeleur, I think I answered that question some moments ago. I now repeat that under no circumstances can I at this time entertain any proposal for my daughter's hand."

"Pardon me if I press another question. Will you at any future time entertain any such proposal from any quarter?"

"That depends. I cannot say now. Who can speak for the future?"

"Then you have not devoted your daughter to a life of celibacy?"

"Assuredly not. Why should I? I presume that Berenice will follow the laws of life, and marry when the proper time and person come."

"One boon, then. One; and the last that I shall ask."

"What is it?"

"Permit me to see your lovely daughter once more only, to acquaint her with the issue of this interview," entreated the lover, taking the lady's hand, and raising his eyes imploringly to her face.

Mrs. Brooke was about to refuse, but those beseeching eyes held hers with a mighty power; she could not resist their prayer; so she answered:

"On one condition I grant your wish—that you will pledge me your word and honor not to seek to bind Berenice to any engagement, but to leave her as free as you find her."

"I pledge you my sacred word and honor that I will obey your commands in this respect. And I thank you deeply, madam, even for this grace," said Vane, as he raised the lady's hand and pressed it to his lips.

And then they left the room together.

Mrs. Brooke not only kept her word in granting Vane permission to see her daughter once more; but in facilitating the meeting.

In a house so full of company it was not easy for him

to gain an interview with his ladylove without her mother's assistance.

Mrs. Brooke managed matters so well that soon after the departure of Major Hourie and his nephews for Hourie Hall, Vane found himself in the ladies' sitting-room alone with Berenice. He approached her where she sat sewing at her little worktable, and, leaning over her chair, he whispered:

"My dearest, I have been with your mother this morning."

Berenice started, dropped her work, and looked up—her bosom rising and falling, her face flushing and paling, her lips apart, her eyes at first eagerly questioning, and then dropped. But she spoke no word, and her lover continued:

"Your dear mother deems her daughter's hand too rich a prize to be sought and won by an unknown adventurer, as she holds me to be. She has forbidden me to think of you, as if I evermore could think of anything else, or cease to think of you. She has forbidden me to hope for you, as if such hope were not the elixir of my life!"

As he spoke, gazing passionately on her face, he saw her cheeks grow deadly white, and her form sway, as if she were about to swoon; in the instant that he observed this, and before he could spring to support her, she rallied, recovered herself, and murmured:

"Is this the end? Must we part so?"

"No!" he earnestly replied; "never! My own only love, I cannot ask you to pledge your hand to me, for I have given my word to your mother that I will not do so without her sanction; but I will, and I do, solemnly pledge myself to you. I will be faithful to you forever. I will never resign you, but at your own bidding. I will wait for you any length of time, and I will use every means in my power to retain your affection and to gain your mother's approbation."

"But—you will go away from this neighborhood. You will either continue your travels, or you will return to your distant home, and—I shall see you no more!"

"No, my beloved—no! It shall not be so! I will remain in this neighborhood, where, even if I should be forbidden to visit your dear self, I may at least have the

chance of frequently meeting you in public or hearing of you in society. I will, if necessary, buy a home here and settle down near you to wait for the blessed time when I may be permitted to bear you off to my own fair Southern halls."

"You will not go away! Oh, you have made me so happy by these words! Heaven bless you, dear Vane! Heaven bless you abundantly for your goodness to me! You will stay near me! Oh, I am so glad! Here is my hand. I also promise to be faithful to you, and to wait with you any length of time, and to use every means in my power to merit your constancy and to gain my mother's consent!" exclaimed Berenice, with animation.

"A thousand blessings on you for this sweet pledge, my love; but yet I must not bind you by it. You must be entirely free from any engagement; such is your mother's will, and such was my promise to her. But I, love—I am your willing bondsman forever."

"You will not accept my pledge? Then I will myself keep it for you, and hold it sacred until you ask me for it," smiled Berenice through her tears.

"And that will be, as I frankly told your dear mother, when you are of an age legally to dispose of your hand. Then I will ask you for it. In the meantime, you must be so free that even then you may feel at liberty to refuse me if you shall so please to do."

"As if I could ever change to you! We do not change so, we women of Henniker. We love once and forever. Look at my foremothers. They were, each in her turn, widowed in early youth, and they were each very beautiful and very much sought after, yet neither of them ever loved or married again. No, Vane, I shall never change to you; and I have faith enough in you to feel that you will never change to me either."

"Heaven truly knows that I never will!" fervently ejaculated Vandeleur.

"And now let us finish this lest we wear out the patience of my dear mother. I will never disobey her by marrying against her consent, nor will she grieve me by withholding it, when time and sight has taught her your worth, as faith and love has taught it me," she said, once more holding out her hand.

He caught it eagerly, carried it to his lips and kissed it passionately many times.

And then they went out of the room.

There was no other *tête-à-tête* in the house that day; there was too much company, and too much walking up and down, and going to and fro.

The family and guests dined early, that old Captain Storms might feast once more to his heart's content before leaving Widowville.

In all former feasts Madam Journey had excelled everybody else; in this one she excelled herself. "It was her mightiest and her last"—at least in this series of entertainments.

At three o'clock, punctually, the sleigh came back from Hourie Hall, and Captain Storms, with his whole party, took leave of the ladies of Henniker.

Madam Journey astonished Vane Vandeleur by saying, as she shook hands with him:

"Come again, come soon, and come often."

Of course she did not want the objectionable young man to come back at all; but she could not help saying this, and for the moment she really meant it.

As for Vane and Berenice, they were both delighted.

CHAPTER X.

MYSTERY.

She loves, yet knows not whom she loves,
Nor what his race, nor whence he came;
Like one who meets in Indian groves,
Some beauteous bird, without a name,
Brought by the last ambrosial breeze,
From isles in the undiscovered seas,
To show his plumage for a day
To wondering eyes, and wing away.—Moore.

"Mother, I do wish you hadn't invited that very undesirable young man to come again," said Mrs. Dering, impatiently and even disrespectfully, turning upon the old lady, as soon as her guests were gone.

"Lor'! I couldn't help it, Hortensia! I couldn't, indeed! I couldn't hurt his feelings at any price! But don't be alarmed, Horty! It is quite out of the question for Berry to have him."

"Of course it is, a perfect stranger! A mere adventurer, most likely!"

"If he was a prince of the blood, and a model of wisdom and goodness, it would be all the same! Berry couldn't accept him," said the old lady, very curtly.

"Oh, I don't see that, either! If this stranger should possess rank, riches and honor, he might pretend even to Berry's hand, might he not? She must marry some time, must she not?" demanded Mrs. Dering.

The old lady was silent. She felt that she had already been betrayed into saying more than she had intended upon that subject.

"The girl must marry some time, must she not?" repeated Mrs. Dering.

"Berry is much too young to think of such things!" answered Madam Journey, and then she immediately changed the subject by saying:

"Those two boys of Major Hourie's are sadly smitten with Halcyone! especially the elder, Ernest Blackistone! but she seems to favor the little one—Clarence Fairlie—

Fairy, as I call him. What a pretty little fellow it is, to be sure!"

"Major Hourie is very much annoyed by the admiration his young nephews betray for that girl," said Mrs. Dering, coldly.

"'That girl?' What makes you call Halcyone 'that girl?' And why should Major Hourie feel annoyed at his boys liking her? My goodness! I reckon she is good enough for either of them!" exclaimed the old lady, resentfully, for she was very fond of Captain Storms' pet.

"A foundling, mother! A girl not only without money, but without even a name, good enough for an heir of Hourie Hall?"

"Well, and why not? If she has got no money but what the captain may give her, neither have they much money but what the major will give them. And as for a name, what is that to a girl? If it was the oldest and best name in the world, she would have to part with it when she married. Humph! indeed! if I were the captain, I would not give my pet to either of these young men! The Brigand is a beast, and the Fairy is a fool, to my thinking!" said the old lady, speaking more uncharitably than she ever felt.

"It seems to me that you are very unjust to these young gentlemen," observed Mrs. Dering.

"It is you who are unjust to Halcyone," snapped Madam Journey.

"Well, mother, I am really not enough interested in the subject to dispute with you about it," said Mrs. Dering, passing out of the housekeeping room where this conversation had occurred, and leaving Madam Journey to her congenial task of stoning raisins for a plum cake.

Meanwhile Rosamond Brooke had gone upstairs to her own chamber, where, to her surprise and dismay, she found Berenice sitting pale and sad.

"Why, Berry, my love," she said, approaching her, "Berry, what is the matter?"

"Mother, I came up here to wait for you," the girl began, and then paused.

"You wanted to say something to me?"

"Yes. Oh, mother! mother! you have made me mis-

erable! miserable!" she cried, clasping and straining her hands together.

"I? Berenice, how wildly you talk! I made you miserable!" exclaimed the lady, surprised and displeased.

"Yes, mother, yes! You made Mr. Vandeleur promise——" she began, and stopped again.

"Well, I made the young man promise not to bind you to an engagement. That was all."

"You made him promise not to bind me by any engagement, and that you say was all. But oh, mother! mother! how much was in that all!" cried Berenice. Then, with a sudden impulse, she started up, and threw herself into her mother's arms, buried her face in her mother's bosom and whispered, passionately: "I love him, mamma! I love him! I love him! and cannot live without him!"

Mrs. Brooks shrank from the vehemence of her daughter. She was really shocked. After a few moments of silence from sheer consternation, she exclaimed:

"Berenice, I cannot tell you how much surprised and pained I am that you should make such a confession to me!"

"Oh, mamma! to whom on earth should I make it but to you? Who would sympathize with me so much?"

"A young man you have known for so short a time!"

"I feel as if I had known him all my life! Even as if I had known him intimately in some previous state of existence—so familiar and homogeneous did he seem to me from the very first."

"Stuff and nonsense, Berry! I am really astonished to hear you talk as you do!"

"But why, mamma? Why? You were only eighteen once. And if report speaks truly, it was then you first saw and loved my father. Have you forgotten those days, mother, or that love, though he has been in heaven so many years? No, you have not forgotten!" said Berenice, lifting her head for a moment to gaze on her mother's still beautiful face. "No, you have never forgotten that love; for you who are so fair, fairer than I shall ever be, you have known no second love! Mother! dear mother! as you loved my father, so I love Vane. As my father loved you, he loves me! Oh, mother, mother,

have pity on us!" she sobbed, dropping her head once more upon the lady's bosom.

Mrs. Brooke was touched and moved, but not for that would she yield.

"Berenice, I never heard a young lady talk so in my life! I am mortified to hear you," she answered.

"Oh, mother, why? In all my soul, I find no cause for humiliation in this love. This love, it seems to me religious, devotional, divine! My heart was never before so full of adoration to our Heavenly Father as it has been since I have loved this best creature of His hands!"

"Berenice, you are crazy! 'Best creature!'—a perfect stranger of whom we know next to nothing! probably a penniless adventurer! possibly a disreputable one also!"

"Oh, no, no, no, no!" passionately disclaimed Berenice.

"How should you know anything to the contrary?"

"By every look and tone and gesture! By every glance and word and deed I know that he is what he represents himself to be."

"I am very sorry that he ever was permitted to set foot in this house. And sorrier still that he has had such free companionship with you. And—yes!—sorriest of all that I allowed him this last interview. Tell me, if you please, what passed at that interview."

"Not much, indeed, mamma. He kept his word to you. He bound me by no pledge," answered Berenice, sadly.

"And would you have given him one?"

"But for your prohibition, mamma, yes, I would, for he pledged me his troth."

"He did!" indignantly exclaimed Rosamond Brooke, as the sanguine color flushed scarlet over her fair face and neck. "He dared to do that!"

"Mamma, do not be angry. He did no more than he had a right to do. Surely, he had a right to do as he pleased with his own liberty, though no right at all to meddle with mine unless by your consent."

"I really think the young people of this age are all mad enough to be shut up in lunatic asylums!" exclaimed Rosamond, unable to overcome her anger. "Now, then, tell me what else passed at that discreet interview."

"I accepted his troth, mamma, and though I could not then give him mine, because you had forbidden him to take it, I promised to wait for him until I could do so."

"You promised! That was an evasion! a prevarication! a 'whipping the devil round a stump!'"

"Be patient, dear mamma, and hear me out. He would not take my promise even for so little. While binding himself to me forever, he left me free as air."

"He did right in leaving you free. But let me tell you, Berenice, that you did very, very wrong, under such circumstances, to accept his troth. It is an unequal bargain, for one thing."

"Or it would be, mamma, were I not at heart as firmly bound to him as his plighted word could bind him to me," said Berenice, pale with the earnestness of her soul.

"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Brooke, in dismay, "whatever is to become of this perverse girl? Well, I thank the Lord that the man is going away, and then I hope you will forget him just as fast as ever you fell in love with him. It is the usual consequence, you foolish girl."

"I shall never forget him, dear mamma; nor is he going away—without me," calmly replied Berenice.

"What!" cried Mrs. Brooke. "Not going away without you? What is it you dare to hint?"

"Nothing that need offend you, dear mother. He does not dream of taking your daughter without your leave. But, mamma, I could not bear to part with Vane! I lost my breath at the very though of doing so! I—I believe I told him as much, and begged him not to leave me."

"You! You—my daughter—to lower herself so much!"

"I did not lower myself, dear mother. He loved me so; and I begged him not to leave me. I could not help it. It was a matter of living or of dying to me. It was hard enough—Heaven only knows how hard—for me, after being so happy with him every day, to have him go even from this house; but if he had been going from the neighborhood also, it would have killed me, mamma. It would! it would! So it is for my sake that he consents to stay in the neighborhood, that he may keep me alive by seeing me sometimes, and that he may at last, with your good will and consent to our marriage——"

"That he may hide himself in this remote region to elude the officers of the law until he can run off with an heiress, more likely; for he is very probably a fugitive from justice, or an escaped felon!"

"Oh, mother! mother! how bitterly unjust you are! How sorry you will feel for saying this some day when you shall know him as he is!"

"I wish he was at the Old Nick, that I do! So he has plighted his troth to you; and he is to remain in the neighborhood until he can take you away with him. A pretty arrangement, upon my word and honor! And you, Miss Brooke, what is to be your place in the programme?" sharply demanded the lady.

"I shall hold myself pledged in honor, if not in word, to wait for Vane until he can win your sanction to our union."

"And if he never can, how then?"

"Mamma, I cannot contemplate such a contingency. I have too much faith in Vane's merits and in your own sense of justice."

"I shall go crazy! I cannot compel the fellow to leave the neighborhood—that's certain. I wish the sea had swallowed him!" exclaimed Rosamond Brooke, recklessly expressing a desire that she was certainly never cruel enough to entertain, even for that most obnoxious of all beings, an objectionable (prospective) son-in-law.

"Oh, mother, mother! if you love me do not speak so! Do not! For I love him, mother! I love him! And the harm that should come to him would kill me!"

"Hold your tongue! You're a lunatic! I'll go and have a talk with Grandmother Journey," exclaimed Rosamond Brooke, rising and leaving the room.

Madame Journey was over seventy years of age, and she was too often flouted and badgered by her elderly daughter, and her middle-aged granddaughter. But she was really mistress of the house, and beyond that she was wise and good; so that in any great emergency she was always appealed to.

Mrs. Brooke found her still in the housekeeping-room, and still engaged in picking currants for the next day's plum pudding. Bursting into the room, and throwing herself into a chair, she broke out with:

"Grandma! I wish to goodness that Vane Vandeleur had never entered this house! And now that he is gone, I hope and trust that you will never let him come in again!"

Then she detailed, at some length, the incidents in the interviews between herself and Mr. Vandeleur, between Mr. Vandeleur and Berenice, as related by the latter, and finally between Berenice and herself.

"And now, grandma, you see how it is. They love, or think they love, each other to the death. But they will do nothing wrong, not they. He will keep his word to me and exact no promise from her—not he. And she will not, at least for the present, marry against my will. But yet, he has set himself down here before Henniker as a besieging army invests a city—with the intention of certainly taking it sooner or later. And the worst of it is that in her he has a friend within the fortress."

"Yes; I see how it is. But he cannot conquer even with the aid of 'his friend within the fortress.' For I will so manage this matter that this very friend shall be the one to advise him to raise the siege."

"What, Berenice?"

"Yes, Berenice."

"Berenice advise him to leave this neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"Why, my dear grandma, as I have just told you, she was the very one who first encouraged him—nay, entreated him—to remain."

"But, for all that, she shall be the very one who shall implore him to go away at once."

"You can do this?"

"You will see that I can."

"But how?"

"Never mind; I will undertake that. Send her to me."

Shortly afterward Berenice, seated sewing in the common sitting-room, in company with Mrs. Brooke and Mrs. Dering, received a summons to attend Madam Journey in the old lady's chamber.

With a boding pang at her heart, which could imagine nothing less than another discussion of her own love affairs, the young girl laid aside her work and arose and went to obey the call.

CHAPTER XI.

BERENICE HEARS HER FATE.

I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood.
—SHAKESPEARE.

An hour later, as Mrs. Dering and Mrs. Brooke were seated together in the common sitting-parlor, where Berenice had left them engaged in their needlework, they were startled by a piercing shriek and a heavy fall in Madam Journey's chamber.

Simultaneously they sprang up and rushed into the adjoining room, where they found Berenice extended lifeless upon the floor, and Madam Journey standing with clasped hands and strained eyeballs gazing down upon her.

"Oh, she is dead! You have killed her! Oh, mother, what did you do to her? What did you say to her to throw her into this state?" cried Mrs. Brooke, beside herself with grief and terror, as she threw herself down upon the floor and raised the head of her swooning daughter.

"Berry, my darling, speak to me! speak to me, Berry! Oh, mother, what did you say to her to throw her into this state?"

"I told her the secret," moaned the old lady, in tones so low and hollow that their meaning escaped the ears of her hearers, especially as Mrs. Dering was talking volubly.

"Lay her head down again, Rosamond. Never raise the head of a fainting subject. I thought you knew better than to do that. Don't be alarmed. She is only in a faint. She will come around all right presently. Let me ring for 'Cuba to lay her on the bed. But stay, I think I can do it myself," said Mrs. Dering, stooping and placing her strong arms under the form of the lifeless girl, and raising her as easily as she could have raised a child.

She laid her flat on the bed and flung water in her face, and used other simple remedies to restore her to consciousness.

While Mrs. Dering was thus occupied, Rosamond was again questioning the old lady.

"Grandma, what was it that threw her into this state?" she asked for the third time.

Madam Journey, who had now quite recovered her presence of mind, answered evasively:

"I urged upon her the duty of giving up this young man to whom we are all so opposed. I prevailed upon her to do it, but it went very hard with her, as you see. She fell like a dead woman. But better this than the marriage. Don't be frightened, my dear Rosamond. Your child is only in a swoon. She will come out of it in good time, and then we must all do what we can to comfort and amuse her. As for the dreaded marriage, give yourself no uneasiness about that, either. It will never take place. She herself will tell you so as soon as she comes to her senses."

But it was long before Berenice Brooke came out of the deathlike swoon into which she had been thrown by hearing the fatal family secret. And when at length she did revive, it almost seemed as if the spirit of the real Berenice had fled forever, and some other had taken its place, so differently she looked.

When she opened her eyes, the first object that met her glance were her mother's eyes, gazing anxiously down upon hers.

"Berry, my darling, how are you? How are you, love?" inquired the lady, laying her hand softly upon the damp, dark tresses of the suffering girl.

She closed her eyes again and sighed, but answered nothing.

"Speak to me, Berry. How do you feel, darling?" repeated the lady.

She looked up with a glance full of anguish as she moaned forth her answer.

"I do not know, mamma. Have pity on me. Let me be," and she closed her eyes again.

"Yes, leave her alone. Give her time to recover," advised the old lady.

All that day Berenice lay quietly on the bed, neither speaking nor moving, nor caring to do either.

The next morning she arose and went about her usual occupation, but not in her usual spirit. She was so pale, still, silent, lifeless, that her mother, who, with all her bluster, had a soft heart, and according to Madam Journey, a soft head also, became deeply troubled. Seeking out the broken-hearted girl, she said to her:

"Berry, my darling! Berry, don't grieve so dreadfully. I cannot bear to see you do it. Rather than you should suffer so, I would consent to—to almost anything. So, if you really do think so much of this young man, and he can prove himself to be worthy of you, I will take back my refusal, and I will bring over the others also to consent to your engagement with him——"

"Stop, mother! Dear mother, stop! It is impossible! I cannot marry Vane!" interrupted Berenice, in a voice vibrating with pain.

"Oh, yes you can, if he should prove himself to be fit for you."

"If he were a king, I could not marry him, mamma."

"Oh, yes you could—that is to say, if you both wished to do so."

"Then I would not, mamma! I feel your goodness to me. But I have one prayer to make of you."

"What is it, my darling? I would do anything to give you comfort."

"Never speak of this subject to me again."

"I will not, since it pains you," said Mrs. Brooke.

Later in the day Mrs. Brooke detailed the conversation to Madam Journey.

The old lady's comment upon it was short.

"Berenice is right."

"But the young man will be coming here. You invited him."

"Well, let him come, and let her send him away," said the mistress of the house. "And that also will be right."

CHAPTER XII.

PINKY SKINNER.

Oh, when she's angry she is keen and shrewd!
She was a vixen when she went to school,
And though she is but little she is fierce.
—SHAKESPEARE.

Meanwhile the sleigh containing Captain Storms, his brother, his son, his ward, and his guest, sped onward toward Storms' Point. The road lay along the snow-covered banks of the frozen creek. It was, even at this bleak season, a picturesque and interesting route, especially to the lovers of nature, animate or inanimate. On one side lay the woods, bare of leaves, and sheathed in a panoply of shining ice, but peopled still with its pretty little wild creatures. Snowbirds and red robbins hopped about from twig to twig, from icicle to icicle, in the vain search for worm or insect, seed or nut, long since dead and buried. Poor little starvelings! They must turn mendicants or thieves, or beg and steal their food from about human habitations. Squirrels and rabbits peeped from their holes in the hollows of the trees, and seeing intruders in the shape of dangerous human strangers, scuttled out of sight quickly as their swift little limbs could carry them. Once a fox showed himself, but, seeing his natural enemy, fled as fast as his long legs would let him.

On the other side of the road lay the frozen creek covered with snow, crusted with frost, and fringed with a forest of icicles. Over its hard, white bosom flocks of water fowl flew, screaming as they fled onward toward their haven of rest. Across all slanted the crimson rays of the setting sun, transfiguring the frozen creek into a plain of frosted fire and the ice-sheathed woods into a forest of diamonds.

On sped the sleigh, its passengers closely muffled in furs, for the air was bitter cold, and saying little or nothing to each other, for at the rate at which they were going they had not much chance to talk.

Suddenly Halcyone seized the reins, checked the horses, sprang from the sleigh, and ran into the woods.

"What is that for?" inquired Mr. Vanderleur, in astonishment.

"Who can tell? To redress some wrong, or deliver some victim, perhaps! She is a little Donna Quixotta, she!" laughed old Storms.

"Well, we have got to wait here for her Quixotship, I suppose!" said Mr. Dickson, impatiently.

But even as he spoke Halcyone reappeared, her gay Scotch-plaid dress making a glow of light and color amid the snow as she ran out from the wood and sprang up into her seat beside her uncle.

"Now what was that for?" demanded the old man.

"To upset the birdtraps! Do you think I was going to pass by and leave those treacherous traps there to ensnare the poor little confiding birds? Not if I see them! How would we like it if we should be freezing and starving, and should see a fine feast laid out under a cozy shed, and everything inviting us to enter and be warmed and fed; and then the moment we did enter and sat down to feast, to have the whole concern to fall on us and crush us? And that is just the way we, with our superior intelligence and inferior religion, betray the confiding little creatures that God has trusted to our power!" said Halcyone, indignantly.

"Then I suppose I am not to have a stuffed rabbit nor a jugged hare nor a broiled bird this season, and all on account of your Quixotism!" exclaimed Captain Tom.

"I don't know, guardy. In strict justice, you know, you have not the smallest shadow of right to one of these wild creatures, since you give them neither food, shelter nor care. But I will not say that you shall not have all that you kill with powder and shot—since you kill them openly and even give them a small chance of escape; but as for trapping birds and snaring rabbits, and the like treachery, guardy—if I were to catch any friend of mine at such meanness, I—I would cut his acquaintance! Yes, I would. Is treachery less infamous because it is practised on the smallest and most helpless creatures?" she demanded of the party at large.

"Certainly not," laughed Captain Storms, answering

for the rest. "But is killing less murderous when it destroys the most inoffensive and defenseless of animals? And yet you acknowledge that you tolerate the shooting of birds."

"Yes, tolerate, but not approve! I just tolerate it as the lesser of two almost intolerable practices. Heaven and earth! how much we shall have to answer to our Creator for our ill-usage of his little creatures!"

"Hal McAlpine turned preacher!" exclaimed Mr. Dickson Storms, with a whistle.

"Yes, I will preach for the poor little creatures that can't preach for themselves! For there is only one set of beings that is more utterly in our power, and that I pity more than I do the dumb beasts, and that is the little babies!" said Halcyone.

As she spoke, Captain Storms, who was driving, drew the right rein and turned the horses' heads down toward the creek; they had reached a point where it was supposed to be safe to cross the ice—for the home of the Storms lay beyond the other side of the creek far down on the shores of the bay.

Not a word was spoken during the passage across to the opposite bank. They felt the whole mass of ice quake and give under the weight of their loaded sleigh, they heard it sough and sob as it sank and rose with the force of the suction below—sensations that would have made the boldest of novices, in the same circumstances, quake with fear. But the Storms had dared the like feat too many times to feel any qualms about it now. They landed safely on the other side, and the captain drew the right rein and turned the horses' heads around, and drove down toward the mouth of the creek. And now again they had the ice-clad forest on one hand and the frozen creek on the other. Only now, instead of having the crimson light of the setting sun, they had the white, silvery splendor of the full moon.

It had grown much colder since the sun had set. The travelers drew their wrappings closer around them and huddled together for warmth.

"Whew! I've been on the banks of Greenland in my time, and I'm blowed if I think it was much colder there than it is here now! My hands are so stiff I scarcely can

hold the reins. Here, Hal, take the 'ribbons' a minute, while I beat some life into my fingers," said the captain.

"Allow me, sir!" hastily exclaimed Vane Vandeleur, bending forward.

"No, no, you're 'way back there! You couldn't drive conveniently. Let Hal here take the reins. She's in the right place, and she's used to them, and she won't have to hold 'em more'n a minute. Dan! I do believe my fingers are frost-bitten!" cried the old man, slapping and blowing his hands.

"Never mind, we shall be home in a short time, guardy. We have only six miles to go now. See, here we are at the Old Church Road," said Halcyone, soothingly.

"At the Old Church Road! So we are. We have come like lightning! We shall soon be at the Point now. Mr. Vandeleur, look! there is the Old Church Road, as it is called. It is one of the oldest roads in the old country. It was laid out in the first year of the settlement of the colony. It leads to the site of the first, or one of the first, Catholic churches ever built on this continent. The church was burned by the Indians, but was afterward rebuilt and endowed by a very wealthy woman, who was either a very great saint or a very great sinner, blowed if I know which!—history has left the point unsettled and posterity can't settle it," said the captain.

"Are you speaking of the Church of St. Rosalie?" inquired Vandeleur.

"Why, of course! What other Catholic church is there about here? Souls and bodies! we are not so rich in churches! You had a distant view of it, you know, from the parlor windows of Widowville."

"Of the steeple, rising above a clump of firs on the top of a wooded hill. That was all."

"Well, now, a few rods further on you shall have a full view of the whole establishment, steeple, church, churchyard, priests' house and all—all monuments of the holiness of the saint, or the remorse of the sinner——"

"Or of both," suggested Vane.

"'Or of both,'" agreed the captain, as he stopped the sleigh at a point from which St. Rosalie, with all its dependencies, could be seen.

It was a small Gothic edifice, built of white freestone, in the shape of a cross, and with a high steeple and belfry, and surrounded by a churchyard, shaded with evergreen trees and dotted with tombstones that gleamed like sheeted ghosts through that dark foliage in the moonlight. On the left of the church stood the priests' house, a long, low, white building of one story, with an attic, and surrounded by its kitchen and flower garden, shrubbery and orchard. A low brick wall separated the grounds of the house from the churchyard. And all now in their winter dress of ice and snow shone like silver in the splendor of the moonlight.

"A beautiful group of buildings," said Vane, in sincere approbation.

"Yes; but, man alive! not beautiful enough to keep us sitting here staring at it while we freeze! Get up, ponies!" exclaimed the old man, as he once more started his horses. "Souls and bodies! it is cold enough to freeze h——em!—the Kingdom of Satan! Lord bless us! I hope Pinky Skinner will have something hot and spicy for us when we get home!" fervently added the old man.

"You may take your Bible oath to that, sir," said Harry, laughing; "but whether it will prove palatable or not is a question."

"Ah! I take you, you dog! I take you! You mean she will give us a taste of something hot as to her temper and spicy as to her tongue!"

"Yes, that's just what I do mean."

"Now, Harry, just you let Pinky Skinner alone! You ought to stop talking about her behind her back, when you know very well you daren't even say your soul's your own before her face!" said Halcyone.

"That's so," chuckled the captain.

"But see here, Mr. Vandeleur," said Harry, turning and appealing to Vane, "I leave it to you. Isn't that woman's name enough to begin with? Pinky Skinner! Was ever a name so suggestive of sharp points and acute angles, of claws and fangs, of scratching and flaying, as—'Pinky Skinner!'"

"'A rose by any other name——'" began Vane, smiling.

"No! I protest it wouldn't!" interrupted Harry. "If a rose were called Pinky Skinner, it would be all thorns!"

"But here we are almost home, and the young gentleman will have an opportunity of forming an opinion of the—the individual in question from personal observation," put in the old man.

They had already reached a spot near the mouth of the creek, and had turned southward, and were now driving along the shore of the Chesapeake. On their right hand the bay lay spread out like a sea of fluid silver, shining in the glory of the moonlight.

Before them, some distance ahead, a high point of land crossed the view and stretched far out into the sea. Upon this point stood a large, low, old-fashioned house, with many outbuildings about it, and a few weird trees among them, the whole inclosed in a low stone wall. A bleaker home to look at could scarcely be conceived. Yet the old captain hailed its appearance with pride and joy.

"Ah! there it is! The Point of Storms, or Stormy Point! But whether it was first so named after its owner or after its climate, blest if I can tell. All I know is that my forefathers have lived there nearly two centuries, and it is the most blusterous place on the bay!" he said.

"There is a light!" exclaimed Harry, whose young eyes were very sharp. "There is a light in the old oak parlor. So Pinky is still up. I wonder if she expects us?"

"I daresay she does," put in Mr. Dickson; "perhaps she has been looking for us more or less ever since we have been away."

The sleigh sped on with railway speed until it was stopped by the first gate leading into the captain's domains. Harry jumped down and opened it, and the sleigh passed, then flew on toward the house and drew up before the long porch that sheltered the front doors and windows of the lower story.

"Harry, see to the horses, while I take these shivering souls into the house," said the old man, as, with the agility of youth, he sprang from the sleigh, followed by all his party.

The door of the captain's homestead was seldom locked by day or night. So, without an instant's delay, he turned the latch and opened it, saying, heartily:

"Come in, come in, all hands! I daresay we shall find something comfortable to compensate us for our long, cold drive."

They found "something comfortable" as the old man opened a second door on his right and led his party into a large, old-fashioned, oak-paneled parlor, with a great yawning fireplace, where burned a fire the like of which Vane had never looked upon in his life. Huge hickory logs of the thickness of the tree were piled one upon the top of another, across strong iron firedogs, and all were ablaze with a volume of flame that warmed the room with a genial heat and lighted it up as with an illumination. No need for other light there, and very different that from the splendid, stifling, furnace-heated, gaslit mansion of the city.

For the rest, the room was plain enough. The royal hickory-wood fire in the broad fireplace was the only piece of magnificence in it. The polished oak floor was bare, indeed, but it was so clean and bright that it reflected the firelight as a lake reflects the sunshine. There were no curtains in the big windows, but, as the oaken shutters were closed, the draperies were not missed. Over the fireplace was a high mantelpiece, on which were neatly arranged seashells, corals, whale's teeth, roc's eggs, and other "curiosities" collected by the old skipper in the more extended voyages of his younger days. On both sides of the chimney the recesses were filled up by cupboards with glass doors, through which might be seen still more of the old skipper's ocean treasures. On the walls hung many cheap, colored pictures, mostly portraits of prominent sailors and representations of celebrated sea fights. Chip and flag-bottomed chairs were formally arranged along the walls.

But in the center of the room stood the object of attraction, next in interest and importance to the great hickory fire, namely, a substantial supper-table—a stout oak table, covered with a clean, coarse, linen cloth, and furnished with a serviceable rather than an ornamental set of crockeryware.

You see, the old skipper was a very plain man and lived in a very plain way.

The young guest had barely time to notice these things

before the captain placed chairs near the fire, and bade them all be seated. But they all preferred to stand and rub their hands, and bask in the blaze of the hickory logs until they were well warmed. Then Halcyone ran away to her bedchamber to take off her bonnet and wrappings, and Mr. Dickson, saying that he would go and look up Miss Skinner, also went out of the parlor, so that the captain and his guest were left alone.

"Sit down, sit down!" said the old man, heartily, as he pushed one of the chairs toward his young friend and took another himself; "sit down. We haven't got spring-bottomed, damask-covered 'sleepy hollows' to offer you, such as you enjoyed at Henniker, but we give the best we have with a right good-will. This is a rude bachelor's hall, very different, you must understand, from Widowville. We have no ladies here to get up the elegancies—only an old maid and a child. Well, I can't help it. I did the best I could. It isn't my fault. Goodness knows, I have asked every one of the widows in turn, from the old lady down to 'fair Rosamond,' to come and take care of me and my bachelor's establishment; and they, one and all, refused."

"What shocking bad taste in the ladies!" laughed Vane.

"Yes, that it was," said the captain, confidently, "and, what is more, it was deplorable blindness. But some women never know what's for their own good. Ah, well, there's one more chance left. Little Berry is getting to be of a marriageable age—I will ask her soon."

"How? What?" demanded Vane, astonished that his old friend should make such a statement, even in jest. "Ask Miss Brooke to marry you?"

"Certainly; why not?" retorted the captain, throwing his shoulders back, expanding his chest and thrusting his thumbs into his vest pockets.

"I think you told me that there existed some reason—some all-powerful reason—why Miss Berenice Brooke should never marry at all," said Vane, gravely.

"Hum—ha—yes; so I did," murmured the old man, collapsing. "I did tell you so."

"And you told me more; you said that you had rather your only son should die a bachelor, or marry the meanest maiden in Maryland, than Miss Brooke.

"Yes, I did, I did; and I meant it, and do mean it. And now let me tell you one thing, though I spoke just now in jest, of course—yet I speak in earnest when I assure you that, though it would be a fatality for Berenice to marry you, or Harry, or Blackistone, or Fairlie, or any other young man who is likely to ask her, yet it would be her salvation to marry me."

"You!" exclaimed the lover, in mingled astonishment, jealousy and indignation.

"Yes—me! I could save her as a lightning-rod saves a building from a thunderbolt. I could do it by marrying her myself—and—blowed if I don't think I will, too!"

"Stop! for Heaven's sake, if you are not mad, or if I am not. If you are speaking sense, and I am hearing aright, let me understand this matter," said Vane, in much perplexity and distress. "You say, in effect, that it would be fatal for Miss Berenice Brooke to marry any one of her admirers who are likely to seek her hand, but that it would be salvation for her to marry you——"

"Yes, that is just exactly what I do say! And I am quite sane and sober in saying it, as you see."

"And you even add that you have a great mind to marry her!"

"Yes; for her earthly salvation! If I was on my deathbed to-night, I would send for her to come to me, and I would marry her with my last breath, if she would have me!" said Captain Storms, emphatically.

Vane was gazing fixedly in his face. It was plain that the old man was, as he himself had said, sane and sober, and, moreover, he was in solemn earnest.

"I wish to Heaven I could persuade you to tell me this mystery that hangs over the heiress of Henniker," said the young man, fervently.

"I cannot. I cannot in honor, now that you have enjoyed the hospitality of Henniker, and are even likely to remain in the neighborhood for a definite time," gravely replied the captain.

"This is no jest that you are playing off on me?"

"No jest at all; no romance, either!—as stern a reality as any fact in existence."

"And yet—Mrs. Brooke did not seem to be aware of any reason why her daughter might not marry, except, indeed, her extreme youth," murmured Vane, inadvertently betraying himself.

"She was not in the secret, perhaps—but, oh, by the way, why, how did you come to know of Mrs. Brooke's sentiments in regard to her daughter's marriage? Was that the subject of your *tête-à-tête* this morning?"

"Perhaps! But we will drop that part of the subject, if you please, captain."

"Certainly, if you say so. I know it is considered impolite to ask questions, and especially impolite for a host to cross-question his guest," laughed the old man. Then, abruptly turning from the topic, he exclaimed: "I wonder why Pinky Skinner don't make her appearance! She's sulky, I reckon. She's a cursed shrew, but a first-rate manager, is Miss Skinner. She'll quarrel with you, and sulk with you, and say all manner of bitter and spiteful things to you and about you, but—she will keep your house well and faithfully; and if you should be sick she will nurse you with great tenderness and skill. She is one of those women you can't live with peaceably, nor yet do without, possibly. Why the deuce don't she come?"

The captain's question was answered by the appearance of Miss Skinner herself.

She opened a door at the back of the room, giving a glimpse into a clean, cheery, well-warmed and well-lighted kitchen, and she came forward toward the two gentlemen.

Vane looked up at her with the curiosity that had been excited by the previous conversation, of which she had been the subject.

He saw a little, slim woman, of uncertain age, with a little red head, a little slim face, a fair, rosy complexion, sharp blue eyes, sharp pug nose, and thin lips. She wore a light calico dress, with a white apron and a white collar.

As she came forward, the captain arose to meet her in visible trepidation.

"Miss Skinner, I hope I find you well," he ventured to say.

"Much you hope or fear about it! Will you have your supper?"

"If you please, yes. But here—let me introduce my friend: Miss Skinner, this is Mr. Vandeleur."

"Mr.—Bandoline?"

"No—Vandeleur. Mr. Vane Vandeleur, Miss Pinky Skinner."

Vane bowed and smiled with a deprecating and conciliating expression.

The graciousness was all lost on Miss Skinner.

"Oh! Mr. Vain Vandal Hair," she said, eyeing him from head to foot. "How do you do, Mr. Vain Vandal Hair?" Then, without waiting for an answer to her question, she turned to the captain and asked another:

"Do you want your supper?"

"I told you, yes. I should be glad to get it as soon as you can conveniently give it to me, and so would my friend here."

"Oh, you would! I didn't know, I'm sure!"

"Why, Miss Skinner, you might suppose we would all be unusually hungry after our long, cold ride."

"Oh, how could I tell? I thought after all the fine things you got from your widows at Widowville that you're always bragging of, you would never be able to eat anything I could fix for you," answered Miss Skinner, tossing up her nose.

"Now, now, now, now! Miss Pinky, that is very hard. You know how I value you——"

"Oh, yes, I know how you value me! Going to your widows as soon as ever your ship touched the shore, and staying there a whole month!"

"'A whole month!' Oh! oh! oh! oh! listen to her. Why, it was scarcely a week. And 'as soon as ever my ship touched the shore!' as if she didn't know I was wrecked there!" exclaimed the captain, with an injured expression.

"Wrecked? Oh yes! I know you were wrecked! Right on Widowville, where you wanted to go! Oh yes! the ship was wrecked, nobody was drowned—and not even a bit of the cargo injured. Ah ha! tell that to the marines! It's safe enough to 'wreck' a ship by running it slowly up into shallow water upon a soft, sandy beach—especially

when it is Widowville, where you are sure of being nursed, and coddled, and petted by your widows," sneered Miss Skinner; and it is quite impossible to portray the intensity of spite and scorn she managed to express in the twist of her tongue and the curl of her lips and nose as she uttered these words.

"Hem!" muttered the old man, sticking his elbow into the ribs of his guest with an admonitory poke—"hem! we're in for a quarrel now, and we must get it over before we can get our supper. Jerusalem! wouldn't any stranger think that woman was my wife or sweetheart, to hear her go on at me as she does, and to see me put up with it as I do? But she isn't either the one nor yet the other; and what's more, she never can be, and never could have been. I'd as soon think of making love to a bramble bush, or trying to pet a cat with seventy legs and seventy claws on each leg. Yet what would anybody think to hear her? Blest if I don't tell her she compromises herself, and me too, every day of her life. But what does she care?"

"I'd like to know what you are whispering about there," said Miss Skinner. "Well, maybe manners are changed since I was a child; for I thought—at least I was always taught—that it was rude to whisper in company. But oh! I dare say I am an old-fashioned body, and you have learned better things at Widowville from your widows."

"Pinky Skinner, I do wish you would let those ladies alone, and never trouble yourself about them," said the captain, in distress.

"I trouble myself about them! Humph! indeed! if I never troubled myself about anything else more than I do about your widows, I should have an easy mind!" retorted Miss Skinner, curling up her nose with an expression of intense scorn.

"Come, come, Pinky! Give us our supper. That is a good soul! I know you've got something very nice for us," pleaded the master of the house.

"Oh, dear! Is that the way your widows treat you after keeping you from your home and your friends so long? Send you home half-starved! Oh, my! And after you're running your ship aground on their shore

and making believe you were wrecked, just for an excuse to stay there and be coddled by them! And they to send you home like a famished, ravenous wolf! Oh, no! I'm afraid your 'shipwreck' didn't quite pay, captain! I'm afraid you didn't gain much by that motion! I'm sorry, too; for if I had known how much you had suffered for something to eat, I would have had a pig killed for you! But how could I? I'm sure I thought you would have been treated to the best of everything by your widows after wrecking your ship for their sake, too!"

"Good gracious! Was there ever such a woman!" groaned the captain, wiping the perspiration from his red face. "Pinky, my good soul! Do let us have some supper. Anything will do! The best that you have prepared! Only let us have it at once! Do! And after that I will show you the elegant crimson Paisley shawl and the rich black silk dress I have brought you for a Christmas present! Come, now! I brought it all the way from the city in my own chest; and, though I could not bring my chest home on my sleigh, but was obliged to leave it for the present at Widowville."

"Oh, yes! to have an excuse to go back after it! I know!" interjected Miss Skinner.

"I took your shawl and dress out and brought them with me. I did, indeed! Now, give us some supper! That is a good creature!"

"Well, I suppose I must or you'll eat my head! Sorry I didn't know you had been starved by your widows; because if I had known it I would have given you something better," said Miss Skinner, as she left the room.

"Now, Vandeleur!" said the captain, solemnly and deprecatingly, "isn't this dreadful? Why, to hear how that woman flouts and scorns and scolds me, and abuses and browbeats me, and puts me down, one might believe I was her lawful lord and master! But I'm not, and never will be!"

"Why do you have her here if she annoys you?" pointedly inquired Vane.

"Why, man alive, because I can't help it! For one thing she likes the place and wouldn't leave it if it was to save my life! And for another—she is the best housekeeper in the country, except the widows, of whose

housekeeping she is so intensely jealous. But for all her sharp tongue, she'll give us a very good supper, you'll see!" And the captain rubbed his hands and chuckled.

After a few moments Halcyone came in, looking around cautiously and asking breathlessly:

"Where is she? Has she gone?"

"If you allude to Miss Pinky Skinner, she has retreated and withdrawn into the fortifications of her own dominions," answered the captain, solemnly.

"That's good! Now one can have peace," remarked Halcyone, drawing a chair and seating herself before the fire.

"One would think she was afraid of Miss Pinky!" said the captain.

"No; but I meant that you should receive the shock of battle alone, Guardy! What's the use of being 'six feet one way, three feet t'other,' if you can't bear the brunt of battle?" laughed Halcyone, clapping her hands in glee.

"Humph! humph! humph! I believe in my soul if Pinky were to fly at me and claw my eyes, she'd enjoy it!" growled the old man.

"Be sure she would, if by 'she,' you mean Hal McAlpine," said Halcyone. "But here comes the other cowards!" she added, as the door once more opened and gave admittance to Mr. Dickson and Harry Storms.

They came towards the fire beating their hands together and blowing their fingers.

"Rather bear the frost outside than the fire inside this time, eh? Oh, you are a couple of heroes, are you not?" demanded Captain Storms, turning around upon them.

"Why, yes," answered Harry, impudently; "of course we are heroes; but what especial act of gallantry called your attention to the fact on this occasion?"

"Oh! oh! oh! hear him! So you are quite unconscious then of having displayed 'the better part of valor' in running away from Pinky Skinner's sharp tongue!" exclaimed the old man.

"Hush! Here she comes!" whispered Mr. Dickson, in something very like dismay.

And Miss Skinner entered, bringing a large coffeepot in her hand and followed by two maidservants bearing dishes.

"Eh! my two Hail Maries! How do you do, my girls?" inquired the captain, heartily, as the damsels came in.

Allie and Mary, two bright-eyed, young negresses whom the captain called his Hail Maries, sat the dishes on the table, wiped their hands on the corners of their aprons and then came forward with smiles to welcome their old master, who cordially shook hands with both.

"Glad to see the old boss, eh? Glad he wasn't drowned in that storm? Well, I believe in my soul you are! And I didn't forget you, either, when I was in the city! Witness the bright plaid dresses and the gay bandana head handkerchiefs I have brought you, and will show you soon."

"You had better sit down to supper now, captain," said Pinky Skinner, in a tone and manner, singularly serene in contrast to the sharpness of her late words and actions, "you had better sit down at once. Venison steaks do not improve by cooling."

"Venison steaks! Venison steaks! Oh, Pinky Skinner, you are an angel in a calico gown! But where did you get venison? That's something we didn't ever get at Widowville—did we, Vandeleur? But where did you raise it?" demanded the captain, rubbing his hands in delightful anticipation.

"Pike Turner has come in from the backwoods with a wagonload of game, all frozen. Sit down," said Miss Skinner, as she took her seat at the table—for Miss Pinky always presided.

"Take your seat, Mr. Vandeleur; and the rest of you get into your places. Let's have no delay—'delays are dangerous,' especially when a hot venison steak is cooling."

And in two minutes the whole party gathered around the table, and the host served out the savory dish before him, upon the hot plates beside him, and passed it on to his company.

"And now what is this?" he inquired, lifting the cover of a dish on his right.

"That? A couple of roast prairie fowls," answered Miss Skinner, with a little quiet triumph.

"Prairie fowls!" exclaimed the captain, in delight,

"roast prairie fowls! Oh, Pinky, a moment ago, I called you an angel in a calico gown, but what shall I call you now?"

"A seraph, with a sharp, red nose," suggested Harry, *sotto voce*.

"Oh, Pinky, I'm bound to you forever. Hot venison steaks with currant jelly. Roast prairie fowls with white sauce. What next? What can go beyond them?" demanded the old gourmand, with enthusiasm.

"Raise the cover on your left and see," quietly replied Miss Skinner.

"What's this? What's this?" inquired the captain, as he complied with her request, and peeped into the third dish.

"A fresh buffalo's tongue, boiled and dressed cold with green salad."

The old man uttered a cry of rapture—an inarticulate cry was all that he was at first capable of. Then, finding his voice, he said:

"Oh, Pinky, Pinky, if I was young and handsome I'd marry you on the spot."

"No you wouldn't neither," put in Miss Skinner, "not if I knew it."

"I wish now I'd brought you a velvet dress instead of a silk one, and an India shawl instead of a Paisley one. Oh, Pinky, my angel, my goddess! what shall I do for you?"

"Eat your supper and let your victuals—stop your mouth," replied Miss Skinner.

And the captain took her advice; while Pinky looked on, quietly enjoying her triumph. For, certainly, whatever might be said in favor of the superior housekeeping at Widowville, they had no such luxuries as these there.

"Now, where did you get all these from, Pinky?" inquired the captain, when at length he had laid down his knife and fork to take a rest.

"I told you Pike Turner came in from the West with a wagonload of game. I got the lot from him," repeated Miss Skinner.

"And what did you have to pay him, Miss Pinky?"

"Pay?" echoed the Skinner, with ineffable scorn.

"Oh, I forgot. I beg pardon. Humph! I fear I shall find a rival in this strapping pioneer."

"Not in foolishness, captain; for he never talks folly," retorted Pike's friend, as she arose from the table.

As they had done supper they all followed her example.

And then the captain asked for bedroom candles. And when one of the Hail Maries brought them, he turned to his guest and said:

"As it is late, and you are tired, perhaps you would like to retire."

"If you please," answered Vane.

"Allie!" bawled the captain. And when the damsel named came into the room, "Is the big spare bedchamber got ready?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Come along, then, Vandeleur," he said; and followed by his young guest he led the way out into the uncarpeted hall, up the bare stairs and into a large, bare, bleak front room, that would have been very dreary but for the unfailing comforts of the country-house, the great, open, wood fire, and the comfortable, capacious feather bed, with all its full, soft pillows, and fresh, clean covers. There was very little else in the room—only, indeed, a couple of armchairs, a dressing-table and a washstand, with their accessories. And yet there was an air of cleanliness, health and purity about the place that was very refreshing.

"This must be a very pleasant house in summer," said Vane, approvingly.

"Which means that it is the very reverse in winter, I suppose," suggested the captain.

"No, no, I did not mean that."

"Yes, yes; but it is true. In winter this is the bleakest house I ever saw. There is only one comfort in the case; wood is plenty, and can be had for cutting."

"I like the place as it is," said Vane.

"Glad to hear it! Well, I must bid you good-night. I wish you a good rest. And see here—this is Bachelor's Hall and Liberty's Lodge. There is no iron-clad rule in this house touching the hour of rising and breakfasting. You may rise at any hour that suits you in the

twenty-four, and have your breakfast when you are ready for it," said the captain.

"Thanks and good-night," replied Vane, as his host went out.

Left alone, Vane Vandeleur threw himself into the great armchair before the fire, and gave his mind up to musing over the mystery that surrounded Berenice Brooke. Why must she never marry? What were the circumstances in her short history that would make marriage misery for her? And might there be any way of controlling them and evading the destiny?

And above all, what could old Captain Storms have meant, when he affirmed that though her marriage with any one among her many admirers and suitors would be a fatal event, yet her marriage with himself, the old captain, though it were even on his deathbed, would be her earthly salvation?

Over and over again Vandeleur asked himself these questions, without being able to answer them.

At length, after having perplexed himself with all sorts of conjectures upon this inexplicable subject, he arose and went to bed, and fell asleep to dream that he was very happily married to—a widow of Widowville!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S REST BROKEN.

There is no peace for the wicked.—PROVERBS.
From grave to gay, from lively to severe.—POPE.

Meanwhile the captain went to his own bedroom, and threw himself into his own armchair before the fire.

"I didn't bid them good-night, but I can't help it! They'll have to excuse me! For go downstairs again this night, or budge out of this room I won't for anybody, or anything in this world," he said as he stretched his feet to the fire.

But the captain reckoned without his host, as he had done many times in his life.

There came a knock at the door.

"Hullo! Who the blazes is that?" he called.

"It is I, Guardy! Have you gone to bed?" inquired the voice of Halcyone.

"No! What do you want?"

"Pinky Skinner——"

"Blast Pinky Skinner! What the deuce does she want?" snapped the old man, as he arose and jerked open the door to admit his *protegée*.

"I'm sorry if I have disturbed you, Guardy! But it is quite early yet, and I thought——"

"What does Pinky Skinner want?—devil fly away with her!" exclaimed the captain, cutting his visitor short.

"Oh, nothing! Only she would like to see the presents you were so good as to say you had brought her."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, but——"

"Oh! you artful little minx! You speak one word for Pinky Skinner and two for yourself! You would like to see what is in the parcel for you, wouldn't you, now?"

Halcyone dropped her head and looked very demure.

"Well! Where is the important parcel, then? I know I took it out of the sleigh myself, and brought it into

the hall. I guess it is there now! You had better go and see. And mind! while you are pulling things to pieces don't forget to give my Hail Maries their presents, do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear! But oh, Guardy! Do, like a good Guardy, come and give them out to us yourself! We do like to take them from your own hands, you know!" pleaded Halcyone.

"You are all the time making a fool of me! Get along with you, then! I'm coming!" said the kind-hearted old fellow, leaving his comfortable easy-chair and cosy fireside to go down the bleak staircase and through the windy passage, for the sake of giving pleasure to one thoughtless child and three vain women.

"Here," he said, lifting the great bundle in his arms. "Go before me and open the kitchen door. Pinky and the kitchen-maids are in there, and it will be better to distribute the presents there than to call them into the parlor where Dick and Harry are smoking."

So Halcyone ran before and threw open the kitchen door and the captain followed her in, and threw the big bundle down upon the kitchen table.

"Here! Come forward here, you daughters of Eve! You incarnations of vanity! Come and see what I have brought to feed your folly on!" exclaimed the captain, as he took his penknife from his pocket and began to cut the cords that confined the packet.

Halcyone came and stood by the table, dancing gently and clapping her hands softly, but looking as if she would have liked to break into a jig!

The Hail Maries drew near very shyly, but grinning from ear to ear, and showing ivories that outrivaled the dentist's choicest work.

But Miss Skinner held loftily aloof.

Nevertheless she was the first served.

"Here, Miss Pinky, these are for you," said the old man, crossing the floor to put in her hands the rich, black silk dress and the large crimson Paisley shawl.

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, but I am afraid you have robbed yourself," said Miss Skinner, deprecatingly.

"Robbed myself! How so? Could I wear a gown and a shawl, do you think?" asked the captain.

"No, but the cost——"

"That's my business!" growled the old sailor, as he went back to the table.

Here the Hail Maries each received a green and red dress and a purple and orange head-handkerchief.

"And now, my darling, this is for you," said the old man, lifting from the bottom of the great bundle a large parcel carefully done up.

It was an elegant riding habit of dark blue beaver cloth, elaborately trimmed with black braid and jet buttons.

"Oh! this is splendid! Oh, this is magnificent!" exclaimed Halcyone, in an ecstacy of delight. As she unrolled the habit, out dropped a round box, which was found to contain a small black beaver hat, with black plume.

Halcyone uttered an inarticulate cry of rapture and caught her breath!

"There! Those are all my treasures! Now, please may I go to bed?" demurely inquired the captain.

But Halcyone flew at him, threw herself into his arms, and hugged and kissed him vehemently, as she cried:

"Oh, you dear Guardy! You dear, dear old Guardy! How good you are to us."

But the old man kissed her and shook her off; and then, oppressed with fatigue and satiety and drowsiness, and congratulating himself in feeling in an excessively favorable condition for enjoying an exceedingly comfortable night's rest, he waddled off once more towards his dormitory.

But the captain was not yet to be as happy as he had hoped.

On the very threshold of his chamber door he was met by his son, Mr. Harry.

"My dear father, I have been waiting for you! I must speak to you before I sleep," he said, preceding his parent into the room.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the captain in dismay. "And after the ride I have taken, and the supper I have eaten,

too. Don't bother now, Harry. I am as sleepy as a dog."

"But father, I will not detain you long. I must speak to you to-night," said the young man, with an earnestness that could not be resisted.

"Go on then; only, for Heaven's sake, be short," sighed the veteran, resignedly, as he sank into a chair beside his bed.

Harry took another chair, and after a short pause, fixing his frank blue eyes on his father's, said in a very tremulous voice:

"Father, I love Berenice Brooke. And I have come to——"

"I thought so! I'm blessed if I didn't!" interrupted the old man, every vestige of drowsiness driven from his face.

"Then if you thought so, my father, I hope you will kindly——"

"Pray, have you told her of this?" curtly demanded the captain, cutting right into his son's speech for the second time.

"No, sir. I have not yet told her so in words. Yet——"

"Well, then you had better never tell her; but let the matter drop just where it is," again interrupted the captain.

"No, but my dear father, I love her. My happiness depends upon her acceptance of my love; and I came to you to-night to——"

"Make a fool of yourself, Harry!"

"To ask your consent before I offer her my heart and hand."

"Then you will never get my consent, that is all. I tell you plainly I would just as soon see you dead as married to Berenice Brooke."

"But, sir, you astound me. As lief see me dead as married to that angel! Why, what objection can there be to her? Humph, indeed! The objection I should think would come from the other side, and be leveled against me! I feel quite aware that I am not worthy of that young lady's hand. Yet, nevertheless, if I can gain your consent to my seeking it, I shall hope to gain it."

"Harry, my boy! Harry, my dear boy. Love any other woman in the country, and I shall raise no objection to your marrying her. But do not dream of uniting your fate with that of Berenice Brooke. It would be your ruin," pleaded the old man in deeply agitated tones.

"But, father, you amaze me beyond measure. How could it hurt me to marry the good and beautiful girl whom I love even to idolatry?"

"Love any one else in the wide world, Harry, but do not love Berenice Brooke."

"But I do love her, sir. And of course I cannot change my love about from one to another in that manner. I love no other—and I could love no other but her."

"Then fly from her! Leave the neighborhood! Go on the Indian voyage! Or accompany Pike Turner when he goes back to the West, and hunt buffaloes! Do anything but stay here and sink into that whirlpool of ruin," urged the old sailor.

His son gazed at him as if he thought him distraught.

"Why may I not love Miss Brooke, and seek her hand in marriage?" he inquired, after a pause during which both had regained something of their usual self-possession.

"There are many reasons, so much upon the surface, that it seems to me they would be obvious," rather more calmly replied the captain.

"What are they?" coolly inquired the lover.

"What are they? They are such as to make the match unequal at the very onset. For instance: She is rich; you are poor. She is learned; you are ignorant. She is accomplished; you are uncultivated. She is refined; you are rude."

"But not one of these circumstances from just cause. And for the rest, though our fortunes are fallen, our family is as good as hers. You will have to give me a better reason than any of those, for giving up Miss Brooke," said the lover.

"Then, Harry, I will give you a better reason. To do so, I must tell you a story. But first I wish you to promise me that what I am about to tell you, shall be kept a secret between you and me."

"I promise," said the young man.

The story was told—the story so fraught with fate and terror and direful warning.

The lover listened in awe and wonder, and at first in incredulity, that gradually gave way to conviction. As he heard, his usually bright blue eyes grew dull, and his fair, florid complexion pale with despair.

"And now," said the narrator in conclusion, "now that you know this, go and ask the hand of Berenice Brooke in marriage—if you dare."

The lover's face was livid, and his lips compressed, as with a great agony, but he answered promptly:

"Well! I accept the defiance. I will lay my life at her feet. I will die for her."

CHAPTER XIV.

COUNTRY SPORTS.

Soon as the rising sun drives off the night
And edges eastern clouds with rosy light,
The hearty sportsman, with the merry horn,
Summons the dogs and greets the dappled morn.

RAT-AT-AT-AT-AT-TAT!

Startled, bewildered, alarmed, and only half awake, Vandeleur sprang out of bed, and staggered blindly to the door and opened it.

There stood Captain Storms, in full sporting rig—shooting-jacket, gaiters, game-bag, powder-flask, shot-horn and fowling-piece.

Before Vandeleur could greet his early visitor, the captain exclaimed:

"Come; hurry—there's no time to lose; they may all be off in another hour. Make haste. I'll wait for you ten minutes, if you can get on your clothes in that time. And I'll rig you out with the rest of the things when I get you downstairs. Come—look alive, man! there never was such a morning for game. We'll bag a dozen brace a-piece before breakfast, and then come back with a splendid appetite for Pinky Skinner's muffins and venison steaks."

Now, a keener sportsman than Vane Vandeleur did not live. By the time the captain had bawled himself out of breath, Vane was wide awake, much excited and getting into his clothes as fast as ever he could. Yet he could not forbear to say:

"I thought this was 'Bachelor's Hall' and 'Liberty Lodge,' and I was not to be made to rise before I should be awake, nor to eat before I should be hungry."

"Oh, bosh! Ducks make a difference, and you'll be hungry enough, for that matter, by the time you have bagged your dozen brace," growled the captain.

Vandeleur acknowledged that ducks made a differ-

ence, and so hastily finished his toilet, and followed the old man downstairs.

There he was, fitted out with game-bag, powder-flask, shot-horn and fowling-piece.

Then they went out into the yard, where they found Mr. Dick and Master Harry, both equipped in full sporting rig, and with a dozen pointers and setters leaping and barking around them. And so they all set off for the frozen shore, with deadly designs against the ducks.

"There's Pike Turner!" exclaimed the captain, as with his gun over his shoulder, he trudged through the glorious sunshine and over frozen snow, followed by his party. The old sailor, accustomed to use his eyes at sea, was more far-sighted than his companions.

"Where?" inquired Mr. Dickson.

"There! Right down there on the ice!" answered the captain, as he trudged on faster than ever to join the man in question.

Pike Turner was "a mighty hunter before the Lord"—none greater since the days of Nimrod. Years before this time he had left this neighborhood for the backwoods. A passion for hunting carried him out to the wilderness, where game abounded; but love for the friends he had left behind him, frequently brought him back.

In person, he was a tall and stalwart man, of about fifty years of age, with a complexion deeply bronzed by constant exposure to the elements, and with grizzled hair and beard that had never been touched by the shears or razor. From head to foot, he was clothed in garments made from the skins of wild animals, with the fur on. His cap, shaped not unlike a bishop's mitre, was made of fox skin, his coat and trousers of bearskin, his boots of buffalo's hide, his soft, warm mittens of rabbit skin. With all the rudeness, roughness and ruggedness of the man's aspect, there was one great charm about him—a pure, wholesome cleanliness.

Pike was even said to be amphibious, and to live as much in the water as on the land. He owned up to taking a cold plunge bath every morning of his life, summer and winter—never hesitating to break the ice for the purpose, when it was necessary and practicable.

And, moreover, Pike loved Pinky Skinner. He did, indeed! It is strange, it is marvelous, it is incredible; I don't expect you to believe it; but he really did! He had loved her in his youth, when she was a pretty, little, graceful girl, busy, and helpful in her father's cottage, and he loved her still, now that she was a cross-grained old creature, keeping house for Captain Storms.

In those first days he had found her and found some favor in her sight; but her father, a very prudent man, had disapproved of him as a wild, roving youngster, and so he had been sent about his business; and shortly after that, he went West, as I said.

But when, years after, he heard that her parents were dead, and she (at the ripe age of thirty), was "an orphan," as he termed it, he came back from the wilderness, sought her out, and offered her the unchanged love of his honest heart, and the support of his strong hand.

But he was clothed in furs from head to foot; his skin was bronzed, and his hair and beard untrimmed; and so she told him that she would just as lief marry a gorilla, and she dismissed him, and took service as housekeeper at Stormy Point.

Once more before he left the neighborhood, he went to see her, to say to her:

"I shall come back every year, Pinky, to know if you have changed your mind. If ever you do, Pinky, you must let me know, and then you will find that I haven't changed mine."

But she sniffed at him and told him that it was not likely she should change her mind, as she seldom did such things.

"How are you, Pike? Glad to see you! When did you get in!" heartily inquired the captain.

"Two days ago. How do you do yourself, captain?" said the hunter, turning to greet his old friend.

Meantime the other men came up and cordially saluted the backwoodsman.

"How do you do, Mr. Dickson? Not married yet, eh, Master Harry? So much the better. You can afford to wait at your age. Come, go West with me and see some life before you settle down," said the hunter, ad-

dressing himself to Captain Storms' son and heir, after having shaken hands right and left.

"That's what I want him to do! I wish you would take him with you, Pike," put in the captain.

"I'll do it with the greatest pleasure in life if he'll go," smiled the hunter, turning to Harry.

"Thank you," answered the young man, but he did not farther commit himself.

"And now you must know my friend—Mr. Vandeleur —Mr. Turner."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, stranger," said the backwoodsman, grasping Vane's hand with a grip that made him wince.

"And now let's go look after the ducks" said the captain, impatiently.

And they all started out.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRAW RIDE.

Boys and girls, come out to play!
Come out to play! Come out to play!
Boys and girls come out to play!
The moon shines bright, as bright as day!
—Rustic Song.

The hunters returned laden with game; and thoroughly enjoyed the sumptuous dinner provided by Miss Skinner, who deigned to be in a good humor. And little Halcyone was delightful.

That evening they were all sitting around the fire. Captain Storms was telling one of his inexhaustible stock of sea stories; and Dick, Harry, and Vane were idly listening. Halcyone was busily embroidering a pair of slippers; Miss Pinky knitting; and the Hail Maries, seated on low stools at a respectful distance, were cutting cotton yarn into lengths for the wicks of dip-candles.

Miss Pinky, with her handmaids, had joined the parlor circle—not so much for love as for economy in light; for though candles cost nothing else, being of home manufacture, they cost some trouble, which Miss Skinner was willing to save.

As for the master of the house, he always encouraged them to come, because in his patriarchal character and affectionate nature he liked to have his whole household about him in the evening.

Vane was just in the act of suppressing a yawn over the captain's story, which he had heard once before, while furtively glancing through the bare window out upon the dazzling plains of snow, now lighted up by the rising moon, and thinking how quiet—to say the least of them—were these winter evenings in the country compared to the winter evenings in town, and how improbable, not to say impossible, it was that there should be any chance visitor, unless it might be some benighted traveler, when——

The merry sound of many bells struck upon his ear, and a great, dashing sleigh, crowded with people, flashed into view.

"A surprise-party, by all that's jolly!" joyously exclimed the captain, starting up and rushing out to open the front door.

He was met by a crowd of young men and young girls pouring into the hall, laughing, talking, jesting, and altogether beside themselves with glee.

"Ho, Fulvia! Hey, Flavia! How do, Jim? Good evening, Bob! Welcome, every one of you! A hundred thousand welcomes, you rogues! Throw off your wrappings, and come to the fire. We'll have the room cleared in a trice for dancing—for I see you have the fiddlers with you, and we'll dance while supper's getting ready," said the captain, shaking hands right and left with all the boys, and wanting to kiss all the girls.

"I won't get supper for them to-night," muttered Miss Pinky, in a tone "not loud, but deep."

"No, no, captain; we didn't come to stop here, this time; we only came to pick you all up, and take you along," laughed the lovely brunette whom the old man had called Fulvia, as they all poured into the parlor.

Vane Vandeleur rose respectfully, while Mr. Dick, Master Harry, and Halcyone started up and rushed forward to welcome them.

They shook hands, and kissed, and crowded around the fire—Miss Skinner and the Hail Maries scudding away to make room for them.

"No, no; we can't sit down—we can't, indeed; we haven't time. We'll stand here, and warm ourselves until you all get ready," exclaimed the fair blonde, whom the captain had called Flavia—"Who is that very handsome stranger, Halcyone?" she inquired in a lowered tone.

"I will introduce him," replied Hal.

Then, turning to Vane, who still stood respectfully waiting to be presented, she said:

"Mr. Vandeleur, let me make you acquainted with Miss Flavia Wall."

Vane bowed low before the pretty blonde, who curtsied gracefully.

"Miss Fulvia Wall," added Halcyone, presenting him in turn to the other sister.

And Vane bowed still lower before the beautiful brunette, who bent her graceful little head in acknowledgment.

Then Halcyone introduced him, in succession, to about a dozen more young ladies and as many young gentlemen who formed the party.

"Come, now—hurry and get ready; you have not a moment to spare," urged dark-eyed Fulvia.

"You will join your friends in our straw ride, we hope, Mr. Vandeleur?" smiled blue-eyed Flavia.

Vane bowed his thanks, but was hesitating as to the propriety of accepting the invitation that he reflected might have been given as a mere matter of form, when Flavia pleasantly repeated her question, which was eagerly chorused by at least twenty voices. And Vane bowed again and answered:

"With great pleasure."

"And how is your uncle, my darling?" inquired the captain, as he stretched out his great arms in struggling into his overcoat.

"Oh, just as well and happy as ever he can be!" answered the twin sisters, speaking together.

"Hear that! And he ninety-nine years old! Yes, gentlemen and ladies, if Mr. Basil Wall should be spared to us a few months longer, as Heaven grant he may, he will complete his century. Think of that! Why I feel quite a youth when I look at him!" exclaimed the captain in delight. He spoke truly. It did make him feel young to see how well and happy that aged Christian patriarch could be at ninety-nine!

"Who did you leave with him, my beauties, for I know you didn't leave him alone with the servants?"

"We left Pike Turner, bless his dear old soul; he volunteered to stay, like a duck, and a dove, and an angel as he is. And we left him and uncle happy in opposite chimney corners, with a smoking bowl of mulled cider on the table between them. Uncle never drinks anything stronger than cider, you know, captain," said Fulvia.

"Ah, no; I know he doesn't; and that, perhaps, is the

reason of his health and longevity," sighed the captain, with a compunctious retrospection of his own many rum-punches and gin-toddies.

While this talk was going on, Halcyone had tripped away to prepare herself for her ride; and her example had been followed by Vane, Dick and Harry. But while Halcyone had to go away up to the garret for her wraps, the men went no further than the row of pegs in the hall. So they were now all ready and waiting for Hal. She quickly joined them.

Miss Pinky Skinner had been pressed to make one of the party, but had declined the pleasure, prophesying pleurisies and pneumonias and diphtherias and deaths to the whole concern.

They crowded into the "sleigh," if the improvised machine for the excursion could be called one.

It was, in fact, old Mr. Basil Wall's great freight wagon, whose legitimate office it was to convey hogsheads of tobacco from the plantation barns to the steamboat landings to be shipped off to market. They had taken this capacious vehicle off its wheels and put it upon "runners." Then they had filled it with clean straw, and harnessed it to four stout draught horses, and crowded it with young people well wrapped up, and started it upon a certain neighborhood frolic, known as a "straw ride."

A merry party they were, the girls wearing their plainest winter dresses, with thick blanket shawls around their shoulders, and soft woolen hoods on their heads, and the young men well encased in heavy overcoats and warm fur caps.

"But where are we going?" inquired the old captain, as he took his seat in the front of the sleigh between the fiddler and banjo player, and behind the driver. "Where are we going?"

"You are going where we mean to carry you. You are to have faith in us," said Fulvia.

"And 'go it blind,' I suppose!" put in the captain.

"Exactly," laughed Flavia.

And the horses started, the bells rang, and the sleigh flew over the snow-fields in the bright moonlight.

The sleigh flew! fields of snow and forests of icicles

fled away behind it! Its course was towards the head of the creek.

Presently St. Rosalie's, on its cedar-crowned hill, loomed in sight, and the next instant was reached.

"Don't let us all get out here," said Fulvia, who was the queen of the party—"'tis not likely that any of them will go, unless it is Father Bonhomme, though of course it is right to ask all the fathers. You go in, captain, and try to get them all to come; but anyway, make Father Bonhomme."

Captain Storms sprang out, agile as any young man, opened the rustic gate, ran up the little walk and knocked at the white door of the priests' house. It was quickly opened and the captain disappeared within.

Some minutes passed in suspense.

"Father Bonhomme is getting ready to come, you may depend, else the captain would have been back before this. I wonder what o'clock it is?" said Fulvia, impatiently.

"It was a quarter to eight when we left home; and it was a quarter past when we left Captain Storms'."

"Let me try if I can at my watch," said Flavia, driving her hand down under her manifold wrappings. "It is half-past eight now," she added, after consulting her time-piece.

"That is late," said Flavia.

"Well, we've got the long bright moonlight night before us, and we don't care, do we, girls?" laughed Flavia.

"No!" answeerd a chorus of silvery voices.

"And here comes Father Bonhomme with Captain Storms, sure enough!" exclaimed Fulvia, as the forms of the captain and the priest appeared at the door and came down the walk.

"I couldn't get either of the others to come. Father Ignatius was too conscientious and Father Francis too melancholy to take part in any such moonlight flitting!" laughed Captain Storms.

"And Father Bonhomme only comes to keep you all in order, my children!" laughed the priest, as he climbed up into the sleigh and shook hands all around.

"Now, where are you going to take me? The cap-

tain couldn't tell. Where are we going?" inquired the father, as he found a seat.

"Oh, that's a secret! We have so much faith in you, father, that you must have a little bit in us and let us carry you where we like!" said Fulvia.

And again the horses started, the bells rung out merrily and the sleigh sped over the white ground.

On it sped, fields of snow and forests of icicles flying away behind it as before. Its course was still up the creek.

"Turn here, Uncle Peter!" exclaimed Queen Fulvia, as they reached a certain spot where it was deemed safe to cross on the ice. The horses' heads were pulled sharply around and the sleigh shot across the frozen creek in no time.

"Now turn down!" ordered Flavia.

And again the horses' heads were drawn quickly around and the sleigh flew on, its course being now down the north bank of the creek.

And Vane Vandeleur's heart stood still as the sleigh shot into the grounds of Henniker and drew up at the foot of the terrace before the house.

"'What o'clock, old witch?'" asked Fulvia of her sister.

"A quarter to nine,' answered Flavia.

"All right—we are in very good time. The ladies are not thinking of going to bed for an hour yet."

"Is it here you are going to give your surprise party?" inquired Father Bonhomme.

"Of course it is. And we couldn't have it in a better place. Won't we have a supper!" exclaimed Captain Storms, jumping to the conclusion and answering for everybody.

Vane's heart recovered its functions, but with a very accelerated action.

"It is here you are going to stop?" he said, half questioningly, to the queen.

"Not a bit of it," laughed Fulvia; "but I must get out here."

And, before Vane or any one else could get down to assist her, she sprang from the sleigh and ran up the steps of the terrace leading to the house. Several of

her companions followed her. All the dogs about the place burst out to see what the noise was, and added to it a hundredfold by their vociferous barking. But when they recognized their friends, they immediately fawned upon them and welcomed them.

The windows of the sitting-room were lighted up and the blinds left open so that our straw party could see the three widows sitting around their common work-table, before the fire, and Berenice reclining on a sofa. Fulvia knocked loudly; but apparently, even before she had done so, the inmates had received notice of the approach of the visitors, for the door was instantly opened by old Euripides, who stood bowing and grinning before them.

"How do, You-Rip?"

"Lors, Miss Fulvia!"

"Are the ladies in?—but of course they are; and, besides, I saw them."

"Come in, Miss Fulvia—come in, young ladies and gentlemen," said Euripides, holding wide the front door.

But he opened the drawing-room door, and ushered the crowd in there, saying:

"I will go and tell the ladies."

"Never mind, You-Rip! I will go myself; or rather I will go with you," exclaimed Fulvia, unceremoniously running across the hall and entering the widows' sanctum.

All the ladies around the worktable started up to welcome her, shaking her hand, and expressing their surprise and pleasure at the visit.

Even pale Berenice arose from the sofa and received her with a smile and a kiss, and an attempt to remove her hood.

"No, indeed, I thank you! I havn't time to stop! It's a straw ride! Come, get ready, all of you, and go with us. Come, Madam Journey! Come, Mrs. Dering and Mamma Brooke! Get ready, all of you! and you, Berenice, hurry!" she exclaimed.

The ladies taken by surprise could say neither yes nor no at first. Madam Journey at length opened her mouth.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Always the same! Everybody wants to know that! We are going to astonish one of our neighbors, that's all!"

"I think you must have astonished more than one already! Who is with you?" inquired Madam Journey.

Fulvia rapidly went over the names of her company.

"Ah ha! and so that young stranger, Vandeleur, is of the company?" said Madam Journey glancing uneasily towards Berenice, whose cheek was flushing and paling rapidly.

"Yes! Isn't he handsome, and graceful, and so fascinating? Who is he? We found him at Stormy Point with the captain, and so we invited him! We couldn't make a bridge over his nose you know!"

"Of course not; you were right in asking him."

"But who is he?"

"I know no more than you may have already heard. He is Mr. Vandeleur, and was a passenger on the *Carrier*, that's all."

"Oh, but hurry, all you who are going with us! Here we stand gossiping while time is flying," impatiently exclaimed Fulvia.

"Would you like to go, Berry, my dear?" inquired the old lady, turning to her pet.

"Mamma!" exclaimed Mrs. Dering in rebuke.

"Grandma!" at the same moment murmured Mrs. Brooke in uneasiness.

"My dears, I know what I am about. Berry, darling, would you like to go?" persisted the old lady.

Berry's color was coming and going, her bosom rising and falling in great agitation, her voice trembling and sinking, as she answered:

"I—I don't know! I——"

"Yes, Berry! you do want to go! And so you shall, too! And I will accompany you. Come into my room and get ready!" said the kind-hearted old lady. Then, stooping to her daughter and granddaughter, she whispered:

"It is much better that she should, even if he is of the party."

Yes, Berenice did wish to join that company; and chiefly because her lover was among them. She could not

marry him. She knew that now, and the knowledge was breaking her heart. But oh, how she longed to see him once more! It had been but three days since he had left the house; yet those three lonely days seemed to her longer than the whole of her life that had preceded them. So she joyfully followed the old lady into the adjoining bedroom, and sent a maid upstairs for her hood and cloak.

As for Madam Journey, she instinctively felt that the same course which might have been the wisest in the case of another girl in similar circumstances—total sequestration from the society of her lover—would have been fatal in that of Berenice. Though she could not marry him, it was a matter of life and death to her to see him sometimes. And Madam Journey thought it better that she should see him in a large, gay company of young ladies and gentlemen on just such a frolic as this. So she hurried her preparations.

"Won't either of you ladies go?" asked Fulvia, when she was left with the two widows.

"No; we prefer to stay indoors in such weather," said Mrs. Dering.

"And, indeed, I don't think it is very prudent in grandma to take Berry out—but she knows best," added Mrs. Brooks.

"What is the matter with Berry? She looks as if she either had been very ill, or was going to be. What is it?"

"Not much. She has been too closely confined to the house during this dreadful weather, and her spirits have suffered from this seclusion, I suppose," said Mrs. Brooke, evasively.

"Then, of course, the ride will do her good. Madam Journey was right, and I wonder you objected, dear Mrs. Brooke," said Fulvia, as she stood warming her hands before the fire.

Before Mrs. Brooke could reply, Madam Journey, wrapped in furs and shawls from head to foot, came into the room, followed by Berenice, who was equally well defended from the weather.

"I don't suppose we shall be home before to-morrow, so nobody need sit up for us," said this gay old lady, as she bade good-night to those who were to stay at home.

Fulvia flew across to the drawing-room, and summoned her companions to come out.

Madam Journey and Berenice met them in the hall, where there was a hasty general greeting.

The hand of Berenice was clasped within that of Vane, and he whispered:

"Oh, what a joy to meet you again! It seems a lifetime since we parted! How are you, my beloved?"

"I am well; but I wanted to see you so much. I am so glad you came. How have you been, dear Vane?"

"Breaking my heart for——" he began.

But lovers could not have any confidences in that company. They had exchanged these few words while the crowd of young ladies and gentlemen, all at once, were jabbering and giggling around them. And they all in a body hurried off to the sleigh, whirling Vane and Berenice along with them.

Old Captain Storms was among the number left behind in the sleigh.

As soon as he saw Madam Journey among the returning party, he jumped up and clapped his arms and crowed, exclaiming:

"Bravo! that's right! Here's madam herself! Mind, I speak first! I engage her hand for the first set! And we'll open the ball together," and so saying, he jumped down and helped the laughing old lady up into a seat.

His son performed the same office for Berenice, to the indignation of Vane, who had been crowded from her side in the rush for the sleigh.

They were all seated; and then there was more handshaking; and the sleigh flew off again, taking its course still down the north bank of the creek until it reached the mouth; then it turned up the west shore of the bay.

The sleigh flew on as before, plains of ice and snow, and woods of frost and icicles flying away behind it, until it reached a broad road running westward through a deep forest—an enchanted forest of pearl and diamond trees and bushes, wrought by the mighty magician, Jack Frost.

Through this fairy land the sleigh flew mile after mile, until it reached a large clearing, in the midst of which

stood a very old mansion-house, overshadowed by a few hemlock trees.

"We are going to Hourie Hall!" exclaimed Halcyone.

"Yes! We are going to Hourie Hall, to dance all night in the big parlor. There, what do you think of that? Won't we astonish the major, Lord love his dear old heart," said Fulvia, warmly.

"But the idea! Going to a house where there is only an old gentleman and two young men and the servants! No lady to receive you!" said Captain Storms, a little jealously.

"That's the fun, bless you! We have all been some time or other on surprise parties to all the houses in the neighborhood except his, and we always refrained from going there just because there were no ladies to receive us. And so—— Who do you think proposed that we should go to Hourie Hall this time?"

"Who?" inquired Madam Journey.

"Why, uncle, bless his good old soul! He said Major Hourie, the most genial and kind-hearted old gentleman in the community, should not be passed over so completely because he had no wife, sister or daughter to solace his solitude, and we thought he was right, and so we decided to come here! Bless the dogs! I can't hear myself think! I wonder why the planters deem it so necessary to keep so many dogs?" complained Fulvia.

"To guard their sheepfolds and stable to be sure," answered the captain.

"I will get down and speak to them," said Harry, jumping from the sleigh, as it drew up before the old-fashioned house. He quickly dispersed the dogs, just as the house-door opened, and old Major Hourie in person stepped out to see the nature of this late and unexpected arrival.

"Let me go and announce myself and party," said Fulvia, springing from the sleigh and running up the steps that led to the piazza.

"The Queen of the Fairies and all her court!" exclaimed the gallant old gentleman, as he recognized Fulvia and her companions, and advanced to meet them.

"The Queen of the Brownies, if you will! There is nothing fair about me—except my dealings!" laughed

Fulvia, as she frankly held up her cheek for the Major's salute.

"Say rather the Queen of the Amazons at the head of her army come to storm your castle!" put in old Storms.

"The castle surrenders unconditionally to so beautiful a besieger!" replied the courteous old man. Then, turning to her companions, who were now leaving the sleigh and pouring up into the porch, and including the whole party in his sweeping bow, he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, you have done me the greatest honor and pleasure. I am delighted to see you all. Walk in. Ah, Madam Journey, how kind of you to come. Take my arm, if you will do me the favor," added the major, as he attempted to help his oldest guest up the iced and slippery steps.

"I reckon you think I am an old fool to come out to-night on such an expedition as this; but Berry wanted to come, and I didn't want her to join such a harum-scarum party of young folks without my protection," said Madam Journey, deprecatingly.

"My dearest lady, I am proud and enchanted to see you; and I should be something sillier than an idiot to entertain one thought of you that fell short of the highest respect and esteem," replied the major, deferentially, as he led the old lady into the house.

"That's all very well; but I've got the promise of the first dance, and am going to open the ball with madam," called the captain after them.

They were all ushered first into a large old drawing-room, where there was a good fire.

They were all by this time very cold and stiff and numb, and glad to crowd around the hearth.

"Where are the young men? Degenerate dogs, not to be the first to welcome so fair a bevy of ladies. You and I would not have been so backward in our youth, would we, major?" boisterously questioned the captain.

"By no means," said the old gentleman, adding in a lower tone; "but, then, neither you nor I ever smoked in our boyhood. Hush! the young fellows were smoking when you came, and they have fled in dismay to clear themselves of the crowd."

"What o'clock, old witch?" questioned Fulvia of her sister.

"Half-past nine," replied Flavia.

Meanwhile Major Hourie had rung a bell, that presently brought a grey-haired negro servant to his presence.

"Go and tell Molly Cotton to come here directly," said the Major.

In a very short time the door opened and Molly Cotton, cook and housekeeper at Hourie Hall, came into the room —rolled into the room, I had rather said.

In form she was short and round, with a big, motherly bosom, shaped not unlike a feather bed tied around the middle. In complexion she was black and shiny, with white teeth, and a smiling and comfortable expression of countenance.

"Molly, see to the ladies' wants directly," said the master of the house.

"Yes, sar; sartain, marse. When Slyus told me how dey was comed, I sent him to de bedrooms to light de fires. Dey'll be ready in five minutes, marster. Come up de stairs, ladies," was the smiling reply.

They had all come already prepared; they had brought carpet-bags filled with combs and brushes, oils and essences, laces and ribbons, gems and flowers, gloves and slippers, and so on.

And now, with merry haste, they began to adorn themselves for the dance. Very inelegant their dresses would have looked in any fashionable city ballroom; but very appropriate they were for the surprise-party at the old-fashioned country-house.

Take Halcyone's dress, for instance:

She wore the many-hued Scotch-plaid silk of which she was so fond, and her golden-brown curls were bound with blue ribbon.

Or take Fulvia's, which was a royal purple merino dress, set off with orange-colored ribbons and topaz earrings and brooch.

Or even that of Berenice Brooke, the heiress of Henniker, which was a rich, but plain, crimson silk, made with a high neck and long sleeves, befitting the season, finished with a ruffling of old point lace around the neck

and wrists, and set off by a simple set of pearls, consisting only of earrings, breastpin and bandeau for the hair.

They were all soon ready to go downstairs, and they were met in the lower hall by Major Hourie and his two nephews, who again made them all most welcome to Hourie Hall.

Major Hourie took Madam Journey by the hand, and with her led the way to the long drawing-room, where the greater number of the gentlemen were assembled.

Ernest Blackistone impetuously seized the hand of Halcyone, who quite as impetuously snatched it back, and, with more promptitude than politeness, turned and gave it to his cousin, Clarence Fairlie.

Young Blackistone, repulsed and humiliated, turned to the nearest young lady, and with a grave bow offered his arm. And with a merry laugh Flavia Wall accepted the courtesy, well knowing that it was offered at second hand.

At the same time Harry Storms made a rush for Berenice Brooke. But quickly as he had moved, he found himself forestalled by Vane Vandeleur. Mortified and saddened, he fell back, and—hesitatingly and diffidently, as though he felt that he might scarcely venture to do so—he held out his hand to Fulvia, who very good-humoredly accepted the escort of Berry's rejected attendant.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SURPRISE PARTY.

All went merry as a marriage bell.—Byron.
Too many lovers will puzzle a maid.—Anon.

As soon as Vane Vandeleur found Berry's little hand drawn within his arm and clasped against his breast, he stooped and whispered:

"During all our ride I have been trying to get a word with you, but in vain. Did you try to avoid me, my love?"

"Oh, no! how could you think that I did? Never think so again. I will never avoid you, come what may, Vane," she replied.

"Heaven bless you for those kind words, dear love. I wish to have a long, uninterrupted interview with you this very evening. Can you give me one, my dearest?"

"I will try; for I would so much rather sit quietly in some corner and converse with you than mingle with the dancers; but you know, dear Vane, in a crowded room, there may be some chance of isolation; but in a room that is only half full there is very little."

"But you will co-operate with me in trying for this?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But how?"

"For one thing, I shall not dance. All my young friends like dancing so much better than they like me, that they will leave me for that. If you happen to prefer me to Terpsichore you will have an opportunity of indulging your bad taste," she replied, archly.

They had been following in the crowd that poured through the long passage, and their low, love-tuned voices had been drowned, to all but themselves, in the silvery stream of laughter and talk that flowed up all around them. But when they found themselves in the midst of the drawing-room, and saw other couples pairing off and taking their places in the dance, and when they heard the

two rustic musicians—the fiddler and tambourinist—tuning up their instruments, they sauntered off to a distant sofa—not a luxurious, modern sofa, with elastic springs and swan's-down cushions, and satin or velvet covers, but a hard, old case of an antique sofa, stuffed with the stiffest horsehair, and covered with the toughest leather. But the lovers sat down on it side by side, and to them it was a bank of violets, a seat in Paradise.

"They are dancing now. They have no eyes or ears for you or me, and we will talk. Oh, my darling, it is but a day or two, yet how long it seems since I left your house! It was only the house I left, dear Berenice, for I have never left you in the spirit, since I first saw you. I shall never be able to do so. Only two days out of sight of each other. And yet how much I think must have happened in that time! How much I have to ask you! How much you must have to tell me. But first—have you been able to influence the 'Powers' in our favor? Are they more leniently disposed toward our hopes than they were? I have almost judged so, from the kindness with which Mrs. Jernyngham received me. Was I right?" earnestly inquired Vane, as he took her hand, which she permitted to remain in his clasp.

"Was I right?" he repeated.

She hesitated for a moment, her face grew a shade paler and her voice trembled with emotion, as she answered:

"Oh, Vane, Vane, how shall I reply? I know not. They do indeed look on you with much favor at Henniker. It is not that. But—but—for all that—I can never marry you, Vane!" And here her voice broke into low, half-suppressed sobs.

"Berenice!" he exclaimed, in the utmost astonishment.

But she continued to sob in that tearless, silent way that is more heartbreaking than the loudest demonstrations of grief.

"Berenice," he said once again, "what do you mean? I know that you love me! All that you have said—and you are truth itself—assures me that you do! This great emotion confirms my faith in you. I know you love me, Berenice?"

"Oh, I do! I do!" she sobbed, raising her head for a

moment, and then dropping it again upon the arm of the sofa.

"And you promised that though you would yield passive obedience to your mother and guardians, yet, when you should become of age, you would be my wife."

"Yes, I promised that! But oh! I did not know then—what I know now!"

"What is that, Berenice?"

"That I must not marry you, or—any one, ever, in this world. I would not marry any one but you, Vane, even if I might; but I cannot marry even you—least of all you."

"Stop! for Heaven's sake; let us understand this! You say—do you mean to say, Berenice, that you retract your promise to be my wife—at some time or other?" questioned the young man, in deep emotion.

"I must! I have no choice," she moaned.

"And yet you say you love me?"

"And I do! Oh, I do, Vane!" she sighed.

"But you refuse to be my wife?"

"I cannot wed any one, least of all would I wed you."

"'Least of all'—me! In the name of Heaven, why?" inquired Vane, deeply wounded.

"Because—because—I love you too much—too much to pull you down to such destruction!"

"Destruction! There it is again, Berenice. I will not conceal from you that I have heard a hint of this before!" he exclaimed.

"Of this—what?" she cried, with a start and a sudden turn toward him.

"Of this—something—this secret—this nameless mystery in your house, that threatens to prevent your happiness in married life; but that shall not prevent it, I swear."

"Oh yes, I suppose every one in the community knows of the fate that hangs over me. I suppose they knew it long before ever I did, who never heard of it, until last Monday evening," moaned the girl.

"No, my darling, no! Few know anything about it. Indeed, I have understood that there are only three in the whole world who know it, and, Berenice, I am not one of the three. I know there is something; but I do not know

the nature of that nameless something. I come to you now for the knowledge. Tell me what it is, my best, my only love, and I will promise you whatever the impediment may be, since it is not a law of God—and it is not a law of God that stands between us, is it, love?"

"Oh, no! no!"

"Nor any law of man?"

"No, nor any law of man!"

"Nor any duty?"

"Nor any duty!"

"And we love one another?"

"Oh, we do! we do!"

"Then," exclaimed Vane, as his face cleared up in smiles, "then, since we love each other, and since no Divine or human law, or duty, stands between us, we will marry! if not to-day, another! If not this year, next."

"Oh, but there is an impediment between us, great and insurmountable; yes, greater and more insurmountable than those you have named! For listen, Vane! laws may be broken, although we would not break them; and duties may be violated, although we would not violate them; but, Vane, the impediment that stands between you and me cannot be overcome by force, or undermined by cunning. It is indestructible, Vane; it remains forever and ever!" she said, with a grave calmness; for she had now, in a measure, recovered her self-possession, and she looked and spoke with a sort of resigned or patient despair.

"And yet I swear, by all my hopes of salvation, that since this object is neither a law nor a duty, it shall not separate us! And now, my beloved, tell me what it is. The ugliest monster has a name. What is the name of this that stands between you and me?"

"I may not tell you! It must not be talked of! I said, just now, when you hinted to me that you had heard something of this matter, I said, out of my grief and my impatience, that I supposed everybody in the community knew more of this secret, or knew it earlier, than I did, who am the most interested in it. It is not so, however; very few have heard anything about it; fewer still remember it. It is passing out of the memory of man, as all interested desire it to do. It is known now but

by three persons besides myself. And Captain Storms, was he your informant?"

"Yes, he was."

"Captain Storms is not one of the three. He knows but a very small part of the truth."

"Perhaps," thought Vane, "that was the reason why he wouldn't tell me the story. He was unable to do so, and made a virtue of forbearance, or of necessity."

"The facts are known but to three people besides myself—to my Grandmother Jernyngham, to Father Ignatius, and to old Mr. Basil Wall. The two old gentlemen do not believe in this 'something,' and they insist that it should be suffered to die out for want of repetition. And so my Grandmother Jernyngham, who was the last hereditary custodian of the secret, never told either of her other descendants, and only told me as the last resort, when she saw—saw——" and Berenice stopped short and blushed.

"When she saw that you were going, some time or other, to bless me with yourself!" put in Vane Vandeleur.

"'Bless!'" echoed Bernice, with a mournful irony.

"Yes, bless! whatever else may come, yourself shall bless me! But go on, beloved! When Mrs. Jernyngham found out this purpose, what then?"

"She told me a family history, or episode, that she had never told to any other one of her descendants. She told it to me that I might save you, and she bound me by a solemn vow never to divulge this secret to a living soul without her consent. She wishes it to die with me."

"It shall die with you since you wish it. But by all my hopes of happiness, it shall not separate us! I shall hold you by your promise to be my wife at a certain time, and when that time comes I shall claim your hand in marriage!" said the young man, with a conclusive firmness.

"Oh, Vane, my dear, dear, dearest friend! it cannot be! It cannot, indeed, Vane! I should be wrong to let you believe it could, for a moment! Put away the thought from your mind forever, dear, dearest Vane," she pleaded, with her hands clasped.

"And yet, with all, you love me!" he said, in a strangely mournful perplexity.

"Love you, Vane! When my mother bade me think no

more of you, I grieved so heavily that at length she told me that I might—might——"

"Might marry me whenever you liked?" smiled Vane.

"Yes," murmured Berenice, blushing and faintly responding to the smile.

"Then why not take the dear lady at her gracious word? Oh, Berenice, my darling, why not, since you love me?"

"Hush! It is because I love you that I will not do it. I was called into my old grandmother's room, where she told me that episode, when I learned that, for your own sake, I must never marry you, Vane! I fell as one dead to the floor, the first woman of our line that ever succumbed to such weakness! They brought me back to life; but, Vane, in the night of anguish that followed, I thought my soul would have parted, indeed! for I believed then that as I could never be your wife I must never see your face again! I don't know why I thought so; but that was the impression that overwhelmed me, that was crushing out my life, and would have completed its work but for my dear grandmother."

"Berenice! dear Berenice, did it give you so much pain to think of parting with me?" said Vane, taking her hand with deep emotion.

"It nearly killed me; it would have killed me but for my dear old friend. She came to me and asked me why my heart was breaking. I answered because I should see you no more. She told me I should see you as often as I wished to do so. She said that, though I ought not to marry, I might see you. She asked me if I would be contented to see you as I saw my other young friends."

"And you, my beloved, what did you answer to that?"

"I told her no, that I could not be content to see you only as I could see others. I could not be content unless I could know that, at some time or other, our lives should be united, and we should be all in all to each other!"

"Heaven bless you, my darling, for your love and your truth!" fervently exclaimed the lover.

"But I thanked her warmly for the promised indulgence, and I told her that, though it might not satisfy my heart, it would save my life. Oh, Vane! I felt that if I could have you near me, and see you occasionally, I

should be able to live; but not else! not else! for I felt my very life ebbing away that night before my dear grandmother brought me this hope to save me."

"My darling Berenice, I am yours now and forever; yours wholly and entirely."

"I do believe you! And now, dear Vane, I wish you to promise me one thing."

"I will promise anything in the world that you wish, and keep my promise to the death!" he most earnestly declared.

"Promise me, then, that you will not leave the neighborhood, although you cannot marry poor me."

"No; I will never leave the neighborhood while you are in it. Thank you, dearest Berenice, for the permission to stay near you," he fervently added.

"Oh, how much I thank you rather, for I know, I know, how great the sacrifice must be. Vane! I know that many people, being in our circumstances, loving each other without the most distant hope of marriage, would deem it essentially necessary to part utterly, and see no more of each other forever. But I—I have no strength for so sublime a sacrifice, Vane. And you?"

"I do not believe in such unnecessary sacrifices. When lovers part under such circumstances it is because they are really incapable of sacrificing their own selfishness for each other's sake; they leave each other to mate themselves elsewhere. We will not do so. We will love one another and trust in the Lord, and be patient until we can marry."

"But, oh, Vane, we can never, never marry. Oh, put that fallacious hope away from your heart."

"But I will not and cannot, my darling. I look forward steadfastly to our wedding day."

"But the impediment——"

"Being neither a law nor a duty, is a matter of mere moonshine. I shall either overcome it, or undermine it, or walk right through it," resolutely repeated the young lover, as he raised her hand to his lips.

"Hush! stop! this set of quadrille is over, and the dancers are looking about for seats," whispered Berenice, just as Harry Storms, seeing how the leathern sofa was occupied, and being far more desirous of breaking up the

tête-à-tête, than of furnishing his partner with a seat—led Fulvia Wall up to them.

Mr. Vandeleur, as in courtesy bound, arose and bowed and offered the young lady his vacated place.

Fulvia, with a smile, innocently and ignorantly accepted it. And then Harry Storms, bending low before the beautiful Berenice, said:

"Shall I have the honor of a waltz with you?"

"Thanks; but I do not waltz," gently replied the beauty.

"Then may I hope for the pleasure of your hand in the next quadrille?" he persisted.

"Much obliged, but I shall not dance this evening," she answered, sweetly.

"I am very sorry to hear you say so. You, the most graceful waltzer, the most accomplished dancer that we have," he said, with an air of disappointment too real to be misunderstood.

"Mr. Storms' good opinion of my poor accomplishment makes him a little oblivious of the better claims of others to his consideration," said Berenice, in a rebuking little aside.

"By Jove, so it does," breathed Harry, in a fierce whisper, and flushing up to his red hair, as he woke to the knowledge that he had been complimenting Berenice not only at the expense of every other young lady in the room, but even at that of his late partner, Fulvia, who had heard him.

"I meant—I mean—I meant," began the boy, in the utmost confusion of ideas, as he looked from one to the other, with his face as red as his head—redder it could not be.

"You meant—you mean—you meant. Now don't go to make matters worse by trying to flounder out of your position, Mr. Storms," laughed Fulvia, good-humoredly. "You meant the truth and you spoke the truth, and you should not back out of it, even for politeness. We all acknowledge Berry's superiority in all things. She is our sovereign, and however jealous we, her subjects, may be of each other, we dare not be envious of her. Your majesty, I kiss your hand," she added, gayly, suiting the action to the word.

But the waltz music was playing now, and couples were whirling around and around in dizzy circles, and Ernest Blackistone came flying up toward Fulvia, and saying:

"I have been looking for you all over the room. Will you favor me with this waltz?"

"Of course I know I am 'Hobson's choice,'" said Fulvia, with a good-humored glance at the place where Halcyone and Clarence were whirling away to the measure of the melting music—"but there! I am fond of waltzing, and had rather be merry than dignified, so I will go." And she arose and placed her hand in Ernest's arm. He led her away.

But Vane and Berenice were not left alone. Harry lingered near them, a consciously unwelcome addition to their group, but an obstinate loiterer for all that.

In another part of the room another pair of lovers were fretting. Clarence Fairlie having whirled Halcyone around and around in the dizzy dance, until from some cause, mental or physical, or both, he grew faint and giddy; and Halcyone having looked up and seen that his face was as white as a sheet, and guessed that something was wrong, drew him away to a seat and said:

"Clarry, what's the matter? Have I worked you too hard? I am an inveterate waltzer, and apt to forget that all other persons are not like me. I am sorry, Clarry, but you should have told me when you grew sick."

"I'm not sick. It is not that," said the young man, disdainfully; "I never grow giddy from waltzing. No, no, Halcyone, it was not that."

"Then what was it, Clarry? Did any one tread on your toes? We are crowded here, and some people dance so carelessly, and some boys can't bear the least pain, I know! How did it happen, Clarry?" she inquired, sympathetically.

"How did what happen?" curtly questioned Clarence.

"That your toes were trodden upon," said Halcyone, solemnly.

"Bah!" cried Clarence, in intense disgust—"bosh! you are mocking me, Halcyone. You are ruthless. Oh, Halcyone! Halcyone! don't trifle with me any longer. It may be fun for you, but it is death to me——"

"As the pelted frogs said to the pelting boys. But, pray, how have I trifled with you, sir? I don't understand you at all," said Halcyone, in a tone half of mockery, half of displeasure.

"You trifle with me—you torture me! Sometimes you act as if you loved me."

"As if I 'loved' you, sir?" demanded the girl, with a toss of her head.

"Well, then, I beg your pardon if I have said anything amiss. I am crazy, I believe."

"I believe you are," pleasantly assented Halcyone.

"Well, and you drive me crazy—you do, indeed, Halcyone. Sometimes you do behave as if you really loved me—ah, I beg your pardon! I mean, as if you liked me, or preferred me, or tolerated me, or something; and then I am happy; but at other times, even when I am waltzing with you, you seem to forget my very existence, and have all your thoughts occupied with—somebody else."

"How dare you say such things to me, Clarry?" angrily flashed Halcyone.

"Because they are true; you asked me what made me ill, a while ago. I will tell you; it was all you. While I was waltzing with you, and had my arm around your dear waist, and felt your hand on my shoulder, and your lovely hair, and your breath on my cheek—while I felt so heavenly happy that I could not help telling you so—I saw that you did not hear me though I spoke to you; did not see me though I held you in my arms; did not care for me though I was pouring my whole soul forth before you—for your eyes, and ears, and heart were all absorbed in—somebody else."

"Clarry, what is the matter with you? Are you mad?" exclaimed Halcyone, in astonishment and indignation.

"Yes, I am mad, for I love you! I love you! I would carry you off to-night, if I could. And I hate that fellow! I hate him! and I would kill him if I could!" exclaimed the boy, grinding his teeth upon his livid and twitching lips.

"Gracious goodness, you shocking little wretch! would you harm your own cousin?" exclaimed Halcyone, in unaffected horror.

"My own cousin!" drawled the boy, in supreme dis-

dain, "poor Ernest! if possible, he is treated worse than I am. Yet, no—he is not, either; for you use no deceit with him. You do not affect to like him; you do not attempt to conceal your dislike of him. But as for me, you make me your cat's-paw—your convenience; whenever you have wanted to avoid Ernest, you have come over to me, making me believe that you preferred me—making me love you."

"How dare you talk to me in the way you do!" exclaimed Halcyone, flashing her eyes and stamping her foot.

"Because my heart is full to overflowing; because, if I do not speak, it will burst. Oh, Halcyone! Halcyone! you have made me love you—do not make me kill myself, or somebody else!"

"I wonder if the moon is at its full, or if it affects you where it is?" exclaimed Halcyone, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Don't sneer. I tell you, I am nearly desperate. Oh, Halcyone! you have taken my quivering heart out of my bosom—do not cast it down and trample it under your feet," pleaded the boy, in accents so impassioned that they touched the sympathies of the girl, who immediately altered her disdainful tone, and answered, kindly:

"Clarry, if this is true, I am very sorry for it. Dear Clarry, I never meant to mislead you. We have been old playmates all our lives whenever I have been ashore; and I thought I could trust my kind old playmate and turn to him when I was teased by others, and I never thought he would misunderstand me. I am sorry if it has happened otherwise—I am very sorry, Clarry."

"Oh, if you are sorry—if you feel that you have misled me—do what you can to repair the wrong."

"But what can I do, Clarry? I can do nothing but beg your pardon for the past, and avoid you for the future."

"Oh, no, no, no! you must not do that. It is too late for that now. That would be death to me, indeed. There is but one thing left for you to do, Halcyone—but one thing that can save or help me—love me, Halcyone! Oh, my dear, dear Halcyone, love me!" he pleaded, with

quivering lips and tearful eyes, in all the passionate self-abandonment of a boy's first love.

"Clarry, I do love you like a little brother. Be content with that," she gently advised.

"Brother! brother! I'm not your brother, Halcyone! and I can never be your brother! I thank Heaven for that much, at least. Love me as your lover—as your betrothed—as your husband, dear, dear Halcyone! That is the only love I want!" he cried, vehemently clasping her hands and losing and forgetting all boyish diffidence in the impassioned earnestness of his feelings.

A love-lorn Romeo with a mocking Juliet!

"The impudence of this little chap!" muttered Halcyone to herself. Then aloud and more gravely she spoke:

"Clarry, what would your uncle think if he knew you wished to marry a poor little penniless, nameless foundling?"

"Say? If he should speak the truth he would say that I could not anywhere have found a bride so lovely! Only love me, Halcyone! Only say you will marry me, and I will risk all the rest. I have a thousand a year in my own right—and——"

"When you are of age you will have this sum, you mean?" put in Halcyone.

"As soon as I marry I shall have it. Do you suppose when you and I shall be married that my uncle will keep back my fortune and let us suffer? You know that he is too much of a gentleman for that. No, Halcyone. I know him too well. As soon as ever we shall be married, he will take us home, forgive us and turn over my fortune to me. So come, dear Halcyone! tell me when it shall be?"

"Stop a bit, Clarry! we are getting on a little too fast. In the first place, I can't marry you."

"Halcyone! if you reject me, as sure as I stand here, I will walk out and put a bullet through my brain!"

"Ah!" cried Halcyone, with a half-suppressed scream. "You cruel, wicked, shocking boy! how can you terrify me so?"

"As I live, Halcyone, if you reject my love, I will

take my own life. Look in my face and see whether you think I am in earnest."

She turned and gazed at her boy lover, and her own cheeks were blanched to marble whiteness as she gazed. His face was livid, his lips compressed, his brow corrugated, and his eyes glowing like two balls of blue fire. Halcyone gazed at him in horror, thinking the while of all the self-murders from crossed love that she had ever heard or read of.

"Well! Is it to be life or death, Halcyone? Speak! pronounce my sentence before suspense forestalls it and kills me. Take me and tell me to live, or reject me and let me die!" he cried, fixing his burning, glowing eyes upon her.

"Can't you give a body a minute to make up her mind?" cried Halcyone, almost ready to burst into tears of vexation and alarm. "You take one altogether by surprise, and then you hurry and worry and terrify one so that one don't know whether one stands on one's head or one's heels!"

"It takes but litle time to say whether you will accept or reject me; only I would have you remember that these words, acceptance or rejection, mean for me life or death!"

"Oh, dear, dear me! dear, dear me! I wish I had not come to this unlucky dance! It was walking right into a lion's den!" cried Halcyone, wringing her hands.

"Say at once that you reject me, and I will walk out from your presence and you shall see me no more," said Clarence, desperately.

"But I do not wish to say that," suddenly exclaimed Halcyone, in great alarm, as visions of suicidal lovers flashed upon her memory and imagination.

"Then you don't reject me!" he eagerly inquired.

"No, I don't reject you," hastily replied Halcyone, committing herself much more than she meant to do.

"You accept me then! You let me live! Oh, my queen! oh, my angel! how shall I ever thank you enough? My whole life's love and service and devotion shall be yours!" he cried, abandoning himself to joy.

"Clarry, do compose yourself. Don't you see that the music has stopped and the waltzers are looking around

for seats? We shall be observed," said Halcyone, uneasily.

"Well, I will compose myself. I am composed, now that you have given me your promise. Oh, my angel! oh, my queen! If you only knew how I adore you! If you only——"

"Is that being composed? And people are coming this way! Clarry, let me go now! I want to go away by myself and recover my spirits before anybody sees me," exclaimed Halcyone, ready to cry with vexation and dismay, as she broke away from him—first pressing his hands to reassure him and to keep him from cutting his throat during her absence.

She ran upstairs to the large double-bedded chamber that had been placed at the disposal of the ladies. She threw herself down upon one of the sofas and burst into tears of anger and mortification.

"Now, what have I gone and done? Just let myself be cornered and brought to bay in this way and then frightened into making a donkey of myself! And all by a mere boy, and for a mere boy. Ridiculous little jackanapes, to have the impudence to fall in love with me! And now what shall I do? He thinks I have promised to marry him—marry him! bah! But he'll never, never, never understand that when I said I didn't reject him, I meant no more than I said, and I only wanted to prevent his doing something desperate at the moment, and to gain time to know what else to do; and I by no means meant to promise to marry him—marry him! no indeed! But then he acts just as if he thought I had. Oh, dear me, what will become of me! Horrid little brute to go and get up such a fit as that, and to corner me and take such an advantage of me as to threaten to shoot himself if I should refuse to marry him—marry him, the little monkey!" repeated Halcyone, in deep disgust.

And, though she called him "monkey," "jackanapes," "horrid little wretch," and any other opprobrious name she could think of, yet she could not shut out from her "mind's eye" the image of that white, sharp, agonized young face, all the more pathetic in its look

of suffering because of its youth. Nor could she help picturing it in a yet more fearful aspect with

——"that across his throat
Which 'she' had hardly cared to see."

In truth, Halcyone was much to blame; not for willful wantoness, but for careless thoughtlessness. To escape Ernest Blackistone's unwelcome attentions she had taken refuge in the companionship of his younger cousin, whom she regarded as a mere boy. She made a parade of preferring the society of Clarence Fairlie; and for the reasons given, she really did prefer it to that of Ernest Blackistone. She never imagined the effect that her smiles and glances and caressing touches had upon the youth, whom she regarded as a mere child. Clarence was really nineteen, two years older than Halcyone; but his extreme delicacy of feature and complexion made him look much younger, and caused him to be treated very much as a pet, and to be called "Clarry," and "Fairy," and other fond names by his young companions. He had been derisively called "a little dandy," but falsely so called. With the extreme personal beauty, grace and refinement that might have made him a dandy of the first water, there was nothing at all of the dandy in him. He was not at all vain, but earnest; he did not care for the general admiration of ladies, but he wanted the love of Halcyone. He was dying for it! maddening for it! He was the sort of youth to kill himself in a fit of despairing love. And Halcyone had read his character aright for the first time that very night. And the reading had made her miserable. She could not go back to the dancing-room below. She felt that her unintentional levities had fearfully compromised her liberty.

"Who would have thought that fair-haired, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked little fellow ever could have developed so suddenly into such a little devil? Who could have imagined such strength of feeling under such a fair, smooth surface? I never meant to awaken it, that is certain. Is it my fault? Am I a coquette? I never wished to be. What shall I do? I can't marry him—I don't want to. But I musn't tell him so, or he will go and do something to himself. I shall have just to go

on and let him believe that I am going to marry him. And I am not. And I do so hate deceit. But it is to prevent mischief. And, after all, it will be he who deceives himself—oh, dear! oh, dear! but if I let him deceive himself, I shall be deceitful. Oh, what shall I do? Bless the boy! I wish I had never seen his face. A nice time I shall have of it."

Yes, and a nice time she was likely to have of it with a boy-worshiper whose love was like a fever, like a fire; who was besides as jealous as a Turk, and exacting as an Englishman.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN A LOVE SCRAPE.

Was ever woman in this humor wooed,
Was ever woman in this humor won.—SHAKESPEARE.

Halcyone was not one who could be missed from the dancing-room and not be sought.

"Where is she? What has become of her?" were the questions impatiently asked among her young friends. And at length, having sought her in vain through all the lower rooms, a deputation of noisy girls ran up the stairs and burst into the big bedroom, where they found her—moping.

"Why, Halcyone, what is the matter? Whatever are you staying up here by yourself for?" rather crossly inquired Flavia Wall.

"I came up here to be quiet for a while, to rest and recover myself," rather reproachfully answered Halcyone.

"You rest? whoever heard of you being tired?" very incredulously exclaimed the whole party except the gentle Fulvia, who laid her hand caressingly upon Halcyone's head, as she said:

"Why, yes, bless her little heart, she is tired—tired enough to cry about it; and no wonder. Here she has been riding, and dancing, and laughing, and talking for about six hours without stopping. She has been the life of the company all the evening. But it costs something, let me tell you, to be the life of the company. It tells pretty heavily upon one's own life, I assure you."

"Are you so tired as all that, Hal?" asked a chorus of voices.

"Tired?—why to be sure she is. Look at her—she is ready to cry with fatigue now, love her dear soul!" said Fulvia, answering for her friend.

"Yes, I am tired and my head aches," added Halcyone.

"Then all of you go downstairs, and I will stay with Hal till she feels better," ordered Fulvia.

And her companions left the room as noisily as they had entered it.

"Now then, Hal, what is it, really?" confidentially inquired Fulvia, sitting down by the side of the moping girl, and putting her arm around her waist, "come, Hal, tell your Fulvia—what is it?"

"My head aches, I told you," crossly answered Halcyone.

"Yes, but when we girls say our head aches, we, 'most always, mean our heart aches. Now what makes your heart ache?"

"It's my head, I tell you. If my head gave me no more trouble than my heart, I should do well enough."

"Poor little head—let me bathe it with some fine Florida water that I have in my caba; it will be sure to relieve you."

"Don't pet me, please, Fulvia. I'm mad with myself and mad with everybody else."

"Mad with yourself—what for, for goodness' sake?"

"For being such a fool."

"Lor'! if that's any reason for being angry with oneself, the whole world might be in a state of chronic indignation. Don't you know, dear, we are each one of us 'such a fool'; yet we don't feel like laying violent hands on ourselves for our folly either."

"Oh, don't chaff. If you knew how worried I was you wouldn't."

"Well, I won't then; but, bless your little heart, won't you tell your faithful Fulvia what worries you?"

"It is that—that—that shocking little wretch, Clarence Fairlie," burst out Halcyone, whose heart was too full to keep her own counsel.

"Clarence Fairlie! Why, what on earth has he done?" hastily inquired Fulvia.

"Made me promise or half promise to mar—mar—marry him," gasped Halcyone, hysterically.

Fulvia changed color, flushed and paled, and withdrew her arm from the waist of Halcyone. And there was silence between them for a little while.

"You promised to marry him," at length said Fulvia speaking in a low, slow, level tone, unlike her own voice.

"Half promised. And he made me, I tell you. He regularly bated me into it," sobbed Halcyone.

"But how could he do that? You are free," inquired Fulvia, in the same soft, cold tone.

"Frightened me nearly out of my wits—quite out of my wits, I think, since I promised—I mean half promised—to marry him."

"I do not see how he could have frightened you. You were here with your friends. He would not have done you any harm, even if you had not chosen to accept him."

"No, but he could have done himself fatal harm, as he threatened to do—the horrid little brute!"

"Do you mean to say that he actually terrified you into giving him your promise?"

"Half promise, I tell you! half promise!" repeated Halcyone, petulantly and frowning.

"Ah! do you mean to keep your 'half' promise?" inquired Fulvia, in the restrained tone and with a slight touch of irony.

"I don't 'half' know," replied Halcyone, the humor natural to her breaking through all her distress and perplexity—"don't 'half' know, but I 'half' think I shall 'half' keep it."

"This is no subject for jest, Halcyone," gravely remarked Fulvia.

"Don't I know it isn't? And I'm not jesting half as much as I seem to be. I mean what I say, absurd as it seems. It is no joke to me, I tell you. I have heard of 'cruel parents' compelling a girl to marry against her will; but I never in my life before heard of a little brute of a boy-lover actually bullying a girl into promising him. It's atrocious when one comes to think of it. Why the shocking little wretch threatened to shoot himself if I wouldn't have him!"

"Oh, Heaven! has it come to that?" breathed Fulvia, in a deep tone.

Halcyone scarcely heard her, but went on:

"What could I do? I didn't want to marry the little fellow. Neither did I want him to blow the chaff he calls his brains out. I won't say I had rather die than marry the little brute; because I don't want to die at

any price. I had rather marry him, or almost any other decent young man, than actually die, you know, or even see him die. I don't want death to anybody, I know, on any terms at all."

"Well, what are you to do?" inquired Fulvia, in a voice of forced calmness.

"How do I know? Do the best I can. I won't break with him just yet, for fear of his doing himself a mischief; but I will try to let him down easy; and I hope in time he will get over his folly."

Having unburdened her bosom to her friend, Halcyone felt relieved. She got up and shook her dress down into pretty, graceful folds, and went to the glass and twirled her curly hair into ringlets.

But the trouble was only transferred. Fulvia was oppressed with a gloom she could not easily shake off. My discerning reader has already discovered the cause. Fulvia Wall loved Clarence Fairlie. The pretty boy whom Halcyone stigmatized as a horrid little wretch and a shocking little brute, was the darling of Fulvia's heart and eyes. How this glorious beauty, in all the fullness of her rich and ripe womanhood, could condescend to love this handsome but effeminate and immature youth is certainly one of the mysteries of the mischievous little god.

While birdlike Halcyone stood trimming her plumage before the glass, and Fulvia sat brooding before the fire there came another pattering of light feet upon the staircase, and a bevy of girls burst in, exclaiming:

"Supper is ready! Such a supper! Ain't you coming down, Fulvia? Is Halcyone better?"

"Halcyone is better and we are coming down," calmly replied Fulvia, who had a great deal of self-control.

They all went downstairs together.

In the hall below, they found the young men waiting to take them in to supper.

Halcyone's hand was immediately seized by her fair-haired Adonis, who drew it closely within his arm, and whispered as he led her away.

"I am so glad you came down, my lady! my queen! They told me your head ached! Your dear head! I

was so anxious about you! If you had not come down, I should have broken through strict etiquette, and gone up to look for you, my promised bride!"

"Oh, your promised fiddlestick!" muttered Halcyone between her teeth, "and if ever I get out of your way again, I bet I'll keep out of it, you little idiot."

"What are you saying, my love, my queen? Your voice, like Cordelia's, 'was very soft, gentle, and low;' but I love to hear its words. What were they, my angel?" murmured Clarence.

"I was saying that they are pressing upon me from behind, and we must get on faster to the supper-table," snapped Halcyone in a voice that was certainly on this occasion neither "soft, gentle, nor low."

"Ah!" sighed the boy lover in a mortified tone as he heard these fictitious words repeated. But perhaps if he had heard the true words spoken, he would not have felt any better.

He led her to the long table laid out in the long dining-room that was only used when there was a great deal of company in the house. And all her young companions followed, and sat down to as good a supper as the kindhearted Molly could provide in a hurry. There were tea and coffee, cold ham and cold beef, bread and butter, cakes and sweetmeats.

"Make yourselves at home, my young friends. The unexpected delight of your fair company has but one drawback—that we had not time to provide and furnish forth such a feast as we would like to lay before you," said the courteous host, as he took his stand at the head of the table, with Madam Journey sitting on the right hand, and Berenice Brooke on his left.

"Now, Major Hourie, what better could we have possibly desired if you had had a week to prepare?" laughed the old lady.

"You've done capitally, major! You've got a treasure of a housekeeper! 'Her price is above rubies.' It's well they come upon you for a surprise, instead of upon me! We would have all had to dance in a cold room and gone home supperless, for Pinky Skinner!" exclaimed Captain Storms.

All the other members of the company joined in praising the repast set before them, and giving great credit to the housekeeper and housekeeping of the establishment.

It was nearly nine o'clock when the "surprise party" had stormed Hourie Hall, and it was nearly twelve when they sat down to the supper that had been improvised for them in three hours. The night ride through the frosty air, and the after exercise of dancing and waltzing had given all the young people a keen appetite. They demolished the major's impromptu feast in a very flattering manner. No "twelve baskets full," or even twelve thimbles full remained of the ample provisions.

After supper, Madam Journey felt her age and infirmities, which seldom made themselves known even to herself, rather clamorous for repose.

"My dear," she said to Berenice, as they left the drawing-room together, the old lady being on Major Hourie's arm, and the young girl on her lover's; "my dear, I find supper at twelve, midnight, rather soporific. I shall go upstairs to lie down to rest. Come up with me for a moment."

Berenice bowed her head. And when, in crossing the hall, they reached the front of the stairs, the old lady turned to her escort, and saying:

"Good-night, and many thanks, major!" left his arm and went upstairs.

Berenice bowed to her companion, and murmuring:

"I will return presently," followed the elder lady.

"Berenice, my dear," said the old lady as soon as she reached the room, and sat down to rest in one of the chairs; "Berenice, my beloved child, this is the first time in which you have met that young man since I told you our family's fate. And he has never left your side during the whole evening."

"I know it, grandma; but I do not want him to leave me," truthfully answered the young lady.

"You were honest with him, I am sure. You told him——"

"I told him I could never—never—never marry him, or any one else," answered Berenice, solemnly.

"And you did well. You did just what I knew you would do, my brave girl."

Berenice bowed her head.

"I did my compelled duty," she answered.

"And you told him that after this communication he must give you up and go away. Yes, you did. I said that you would."

"Oh, no, no, no, dear grandma, I never told him that. I told him I could never marry him, indeed; but I never told him to go away; I could not, grandma—I could not. We love each other; we wish to pass our whole lives together and to be all in all to each other. But—but—if we cannot do so, we will, at least, each of us be faithful to our fruitless love. We will live near each other and keep our souls alive, with the common comfort that the coldest friends have—of seeing one another once in a while."

"My poor child! my poor, poor Berry! And poor young man, too—I pity him as much as I pity you," murmured Madam Journey.

"And I—I feel for him only, not for myself. I would have been content with my fate if I had been fated to suffer alone; but it is of him—of him that I think, and for him that I grieve," exclaimed Berenice, with impassioned earnestness.

"You do? Then, my child, be noble; be self-sacrificing; be magnanimous; as, alas! alas! none of your foremothers ever were before you. Send the young man from your side forth into the world again. Let him go free to seek his fortune there, in love as in honor and wealth; and dedicate yourself to duty. Women, by reason of their purer nature and more comprehensive charities, can bear a life of celibacy better than men can. Bear your own cross bravely, my beloved Berenice, but let him go free to seek a happier lot," said the old lady, as a holier light illumined her eyes than her descendant had ever seen there.

"Grandma! grandma! I would bid him go to-morrow if I thought his happiness would be secured by his departure; but it would not—it would not—I know it and I feel it," said Berenice, fervently, earnestly, solemnly.

"Ah! my Lord! how is all this to end?" groaned the old lady, in distress.

"It seems to me, grandma, that we shall live till we die, Vane and myself, or perhaps till old age—not happy, because we may not marry; but not yet miserable, because we do not part."

"Ah, my child! my child! my child! if you go on in this way, long before old age shall come, one or the other of you will be dead, or worse—mad," groaned Madam Journey.

"Not so, not so, grandma! Neither I nor Vane will prove so weak as to let misfortune overcome us."

"I was so sure you, when you knew our family fate, would send him away from your presence forever."

"I thought at first of doing so; but when the test came, I could not, grandma, I could not!"

"Well, well, at last, one can but trust in Heaven," said the old lady, gravely.

"And now—will you let me help you to loosen your dress, so that you can lie down in comfort, dear grandma?"

"Yes, yes, loosen my dress. There, that will do, my dear. Ah, the infirmities of age, when mere weariness makes us momentarily forgetful of the most serious cares of life," sighed Madam Journey, as, having been relieved by Berenice of her outer garments, she lay down on one of the beds and resigned herself to sleep.

"A blessed provision of nature, dear grandma," said the young lady, as she carefuly tucked up her aged relative and left her to repose.

Berenice lingered in the room until the audible breathing of Madam Journey assured her of the old lady's profound slumbers, and then she went downstairs.

Vandeleur, on the watch, received her at the foot of the stairs.

"Madam had something to say obnoxious or otherwise to our love?" said Vane, half inquiringly.

"No; I cannot say that her words were either adverse or favorable to us. She thought that, for your own sake, I had better urge you to leave the neighborhood. I could not do as she advised, Vane, and I told her so.

We had an explanation, and she now knows that you are to remain."

"Bless you, my dearest Berry! there is no shadow of turning with you!"

"No; why should there be, when I am happy only to look on you! when I should be most unhappy to turn away from you!"

A tumult of happy voices interrupted them. A bevy of merry girls were crossing the hall from the breakfast-room. Berenice and Vane fell in with the troupe and were carried with them to the dancing-room.

The lovers sat down together on a corner sofa, happy enough for the moment in being near each other.

The elder members of the party, one after another, stole away and lay down on the sofas in the old parlor.

The young people danced all night. Only when morning light peeped into the windows did they allow the lamps to be put out and the tired fiddlers to rest from their labors.

Then, indeed, Queen Fulvia directed one of her gentlemen in waiting to order the royal equipage—the great freight-wagon in which the court had traveled. And she and her wearied subject went upstairs and woke up Madam Journey and began to prepare to go home.

But Major Hourie, courteous gentleman and hospitable host, hearing of the movement, put a stop to the whole proceeding. His friends and guests must not, could not, should not, go away without breakfast, which would be on the table in half an hour, he said. The company willingly consented to remain. They were none of them averse to a hot cup of coffee or tea, to start upon. In fact, Madam Journey declared that she would not go without one.

So poor, good-natured, over-worked Molly, who, between the late supper and the early breakfast, had been up all night cooking, "put her shoulder to the wheel" again, and spread a good table for the tired guests.

After breakfast the company was allowed to depart. They took leave of their kind host with many thanks for his ready welcome, and many warm shakings of his open hand.

"Come and surprise me as often as you can make it

convenient, Queen Fulvia. I shall always consider my poor country-house highly honored by the presence of your majesty and court," said the Major, as the beauty took leave of him.

"No, no; I put my veto on that. One such night of dissipation in a season is quite enough for these young folks, major," said Madam Journey. "Even the presence of an old woman and a priest could hardly sanction the frequent recurrence of this frolic," she added, nodding her head at her host as he lifted her to her seat in the wagon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEWS.

What see you in those papers that you lose
So much complexion? Why, what read you there
That hath so cowarded and chased your blood
Out of appearance?—SHAKESPEARE.

The day was a glorious one, clear, cold, and crisp; the ground was still covered with hard, frozen snow; the woods were still clothed with their foliage of icicles; and the whole landscape glittered under the light of the winter sun that shone down with dazzling splendor from the unclouded, deep-blue sky.

The horses were fresh, and the sleigh flew over the white ground.

It crossed the creek again in safety, and stopped at Widowville, to deposit Madam Journey and her great-granddaughter. There were more handshakings here and more invitations warmly exchanged.

Vane tried to get a word apart with Berenice, but the crowd was too great, and compressed into too small a compass, to make such a pleasure possible. A mutual glance full of devotion, a mutual pressure of the hands at parting, and a low-breathed farewell was all that passed between them. And Berenice followed her grandmother up the terrace stairs, and disappeared within the house.

The sleigh started again and flew on over the crusted snow through morning sunlight, until it reached St. Rosalie, where it stopped to set down Father Bonhomme; then it sped on again until it reached Stormy Point.

"Come on! Come on, all of you, and finish the day with me!" heartily exclaimed old Captain Storms, as the sleigh drew up before his old house.

"Yes, and bring down Pinky Skinner's wrath upon us. Not if we know it," laughed Fulvia.

"Oh, Pinky Skinner be—blessed. Her bite is not half as bad as her bark," replied the captain.

"Now, Heaven forbid it should be. In that case, it would be hydrophobia and certain death," laughed Fulvia.

"Come in; come in," urged the captain.

But the queen preferred to continue her progress, and so the old man and his own party had to take leave and let them go.

They found a fine fire burning in the chimney-place of the old parlor, and Pinky Skinner, assisted by her maids, setting the table for dinner. The housekeeper was in better humor than could have been hoped.

"There is a packet of letters and papers come to the post office for Mr. Vandeleur," she said.

"Ah, thank you very much. I was waiting anxiously for letters," eagerly answered the young man.

"Here they are," she added, taking the parcel from the mantelpiece and handing it to the guest, who immediately carried it to a distant window to examine.

"Did nothing come for me?" inquired the captain.

"No; not a thing, not even a newspaper."

"That's strange, too. I haven't heard from Murdock and Morphy since writing to them about the capsize. And I ought, at least, to have got a letter by this mail."

"Well, you didn't get one, so that's all about it," curtly remarked Miss Skinner.

"No, it isn't all about it, either. Who went to the post office?"

"Do you suspect anybody of stealing your letter?" sharply demanded Miss Skinner.

"Certainly not. But if any of those careless colored boys went after the letters they would be as apt as not to lose one or two without ever saying anything about it. Who did go?"

"Nobody went from here. Pike Turner happened to be in at Costin's store, buying a knife, when the mail came in, and as there was a parcel for Mr. Vandeleur, and Pike was on his way to the house here, he took charge of it," answered Miss Skinner.

"Oh, then, that's all right, and Pike is a jewel of the first water. But where is he now?"

"Sitting in the chimney-corner of the back kitchen."

"In the back kitchen! Pinky Skinner!" exclaimed the captain, wrathfully.

"Well, he wanted to smoke his pipe, and I wasn't going to let him smoke in here; that you may depend on."

"To put my friend, Pike Turner, in the back kitchen to smoke! Why, I say he may smoke in every room in the house, if he wants to. Tell him to come in here directly. Never mind—I'll go and fetch him myself."

And the captain, bravely defying Miss Skinner, trotted off toward the kitchen; but suddenly remembering his other guest, trotted back again and exclaimed:

"Hey! I say. You don't mind smoke, do you, Vandeleur?"

Vane looked up from the letter he was reading. His face was even paler than usual; his expression was troubled; he scarcely heard the purport of the captain's question.

"Good gracious, Mr. Vandeleur, what is the matter? I hope you have heard no ill news from your friends?" anxiously inquired the captain.

"I have very unexpected news; I must leave you at once," replied the young man, gravely.

"Leave us at once! bless my soul alive, why must you? Anybody ill? Anybody dead?" exclaimed the captain, in consternation.

"No one sick or dead, thank Heaven. I have a letter from the oldest friend I have in the world. I will not conceal from you that, soon after my arrival here, I wrote to him imparting a purpose that was very dear to my heart, and asking him to send me certain credentials necessary to forward that purpose."

"Umph! umph! I can guess what that purpose was," chuckled the captain.

"But, while sending me the required papers, he writes and——"

"Raises objections! Ah, ha! 'The course of true love never did——' you know!"

"Implores me to proceed no farther in my purpose until I see him, when he will put me in possession of certain facts in my own history hitherto hidden from me."

"Umph! humph! mystery!"

"I tell you this frankly. It is all I know. I cannot even guess the nature of the communication my friend has to make me, or how it can possibly affect the dear

purpose of my heart. I only know that my friend is true as truth and earnest as death, and would neither deceive nor trifle with me."

"Since you are so very candid with me, who is this trusty old friend of yours?"

"A very old man; my sometime teacher—the Venerable Bishop Waldemar," gravely replied Vandeleur.

"Wald——! what? Not—you don't mean the Rev. John Waldemar?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why, bless my soul alive, he used to be the parish-priest at St. Rosalie's."

"Yes; and he was afterward professor of languages in a Catholic college; and, later on, president of the college; and, last of all, Bishop Waldemar."

"Well, well, what a strange coincidence that you should have been capsized here right upon the coast of your old master's first parish," marveled the captain.

"Yes; he evidently thought it strange, and he entreats me to return without loss of time, and hear what he has to tell me."

"And you must go, of course?"

"Yes, I suppose so; but I must see the ladies of Widowville first," said the young man, uneasily, remembering his positive pledge given to his beloved Berenice not to leave the neighborhood. "I must go to Widowville to-morrow, and on the day after I must start on my journey."

"I don't see how you are to go with the high roads in the state they now are."

"If the mail can travel to Henniker, I can travel from it by the same road and means," answered Vane.

And then, as Halcyone entered the room, followed by Dick and Harry, and as the two maids came in with the boiled ham and the roast turkey, the conversation was changed.

And soon after they all sat down to dinner—Pike Turner among them.

Immediately after dinner Vane Vandeleur went to his own room, where he passed the whole afternoon in making preparations for his journey.

CHAPTER XIX.

VANE DEMANDS THE SECRET.

I have an ear that craves for everything
That hath the slightest sign or omen in it.
—JOANNA BAILLIE.

Very early the next morning Vane Vandeleur, with a sleigh and horse, loaned by Captain Storms, sped over the frozen snow on his way to Widowville.

He drew up at the foot of the lowest terrace, where he was saluted by a hurrah from all the negro boys, who had run out from their quarters at the sound of the sleigh bells, and by a chorus of barks from the dogs which had followed at their heels.

He threw his reins to the nearest boy, jumped from the sleigh and hurried up the steps to the front door, which was opened before he had time to knock.

"De Lors, Marse Wane, sir! dis you? 'Deed, Lors knows I'se mons'ous glad to see you! 'deed I is! Come in out'n de cole, chile!" grinned old Euripides, very hospitably.

"Show me to the drawing-room," quickly requested the visitor.

"Sartainly, Marse Wane! sartainly! to any room into dis house, sar," responded the negro, profusely bowing and opening a door on the opposite side of the hall.

"Now, take my compliments to the ladies, and say that I should be pleased to see Mrs. Brooke for a few moments, if she will be so good as to receive me," said Vane, throwing himself into the armchair before the fire to wait for the coming of his intended mother-in-law.

Meanwhile the widows, seated around their circular worktable, had been warned of an approaching visitor by the silver ringing of the sleigh bells.

They all looked up to see who might be coming.

"It's that young man, Vandeleur, again!" exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, in a vexed tone.

"Yes, so much for mother's invitation," grumbled Mrs. Dering.

"Well, my ladies, look! as long as I have this humble house over my head, its doors shall be open to the deserving stranger," calmly replied Madam Journey.

Berenice said nothing, but bent her head over her work and with a slightly heightened color waited breathlessly.

In a few moments they heard the visitor enter, and in a few more old Euripides opened the door and announced:

"Marster Wane Wanity, madam."

"Show him in here, then," said Madam Journey.

"He 'clines for to come, ma'am. He 'quests for to see Miss Rosamond werry particular."

"Me!" exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, rising with her work in her hand.

"Yes, ma'am, he wants to see you, miss, werry particular, all alone by yourself, ef so you will fabor of him to that degree."

"Well, I suppose I must go and see what he wants," said Mrs. Brooke, putting down her needlework and brushing the thread from her dress.

"He has probably brought those letters of which he spoke to you," observed Madam Journey.

"Very likely," sighed Rosamond.

"But his letters can make no sort of difference in our treatment of his suit to Berenice! Humph, indeed! his letters may be forgeries!" sneered Mrs. Dering.

"His letters are not forgeries, but genuine, no doubt—that is, if he has any letters. But whether he has or not, as you say, Hortensia, they can make no sort of difference," said Madam Journey, gravely.

Then Mrs. Brooke, having slightly arranged her dress, crossed the hall and entered the long drawing-room, where her visitor waited.

"Good-morning, Mr. Vandeleur! You wished to see me, the servant says," began Rosamond Brooke, plunging straight into the subject.

"Good-morning, and many thanks, madam. I am glad to see you well," said Vane, rising and bowing.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable, and now

tell me what's the matter," said Rosamond, waiving him to one of the chimney-corner armchairs, while she herself took the other.

"I am about to leave the neighborhood, my dear Mrs. Brooke," began Vane, in a gentle and serious voice, as he fixed his grave, dark eyes pleadingly on hers.

"Indeed! I thought you had decided to live in this neighborhood," exclaimed Rosamond, a little sarcastically, although she was taken by surprise.

"I have so decided, madam," smiled Vane; "and, moreover, I have pledged my word to your fair daughter to that effect. But, with the leave of absence that I am sure my liege lady will accord me, I must go home for a few days on very particular business."

Rosamond Brooke bowed, a little ironically, but said nothing in reply.

"Before going, I wished to see you, and to come to some happier understanding with you."

Rosamond Brooke slowly shook her head, but still remained silent, waiting for what further he might have to say.

"You may remember the letters I promised to procure for your satisfaction, madam?"

"Yes, I do, of course; you have brought them, I suppose."

"I have."

"It is a pity, for they cannot affect your cause in any way."

"I hope otherwise. And I beg you to reserve your decision, madam, until you see my letters. I wrote to my former preceptor, and my dearest living friend, to procure the credentials for me, and he has done so."

"Indeed, I feel very sorry that any one should have taken so much useless trouble."

"But I am sure that you will not think it so, madam, when you have seen them," said Vane, with a bow and a smile, as he took a parcel from his breast pocket, and began to look over its contents.

Rosamond sighed and sank back in her seat, and resigned herself to be bored.

"Here," said Vane, selecting one document, "here is a letter from the Governor of Louisiana, who was an old

friend of my late father. And here," he continued, taking up another, "is one from the Mayor of New Orleans, who has known me from childhood. And this," he added, indicating a third, "is from the Archbishop of——"

"Oh, Mr. Vandeleur!" here interrupted the lady, with a deprecating gesture, "I feel mortified that you should think it necessary to show all these recommendations, just as if you were——"

"A servant seeking a situation," laughed Vane.

"A politician applying for a post," amended Rosamond.

"Well, I am applying for a post; a post of the highest honor, glory, and happiness—a post more to be desired than that of king consort to a queen regent—the post of husband to the loveliest lady in the land," said the lover earnestly, while his face was radiant with enthusiasm.

"Tut, tut, tut," murmured Rosamond, shaking her head.

"Come, dear Mrs. Brooke. I, a perfect stranger, am seeking from you a mark of the greatest confidence—a pearl of the highest price—the hand of your fair, only child. What less could I do but call upon all who know me to come forward and indorse me?"

"Yes, yes, that's all very well. Nothing could be better. I mean to say that what you have said and done about the credentials is quite correct; but my poor, dear young gentleman, I regret to add that it is quite in vain."

"Madam! madam! do not say so! Your reiteration of those words disturbs me in spite of myself," said Vane, losing all the calmness that had characterized him during this interview.

"I do not say it for myself. Heaven help you, Mr. Vandeleur, it is not I who object to you. Your courtship of my daughter was rather sudden, to be sure, but if she likes you, and the letters prove satisfactory, why, as far as I am concerned, I should be willing to sanction your betrothal to Berenice, under certain conditions."

"Madam, I am willing to submit to any conditions you might propose!" warmly exclaimed Vane.

"Poor fellow, I do pity you. It is perfectly useless, I tell you. If you had the strongest possible credentials from the best possible people, backed by the most ear-

nest efforts of mine to forward your suit, and if you were willing to submit to the severest sort of ordeal, still I tell you that it would be all in vain," said Rosamond Brooke, wringing her hands nervously, and almost ready to cry with vexation.

"But why? But why? You are her mother. And surely if she loves me, and you favor my suit, our happiness will—must be secured," persisted the lover.

"But I tell you no! No matter how real your merits may be, or how well Berenice may like you, or how kindly I may feel disposed toward you, I can do nothing for you."

"But why? But why? Oh, madam, I must know. I have the right to know. My love, my sufferings, give me that right. Why is it then, with the affection of my beloved Berenice, and the favor of her dear mother—her only living parent, my suit must be so fruitless."

"Because you have arrayed against you the two strongest wills and greatest powers of the household—Dorothy Jernyngham and Berenice Brooke—the oldest and the youngest of the family group. To withstand either of them singly would be hard enough; to overcome them together would be simply impossible."

"And how does Mrs. Dering stand affected toward me?"

"I think she would be neutral. I know she would not be implacable. People call my mother proud, haughty, domineering. She is nothing of the sort. She is only tall and stout and rather silent."

"But to get back, to get back to the point that interests me so much. Why, oh, why is it, that in Berenice, who sincerely returns my love, and in Madam Journey, who is my very kindest friend where all are kind—why is it, I ask, that in them I should find the firmest opponents to my happiness?"

"Perhaps they may tell you. They never would tell me. Even when I, having a soft heart——"

"Heaven bless the soft heart," murmured Vane.

"Or a soft head, as my grandmother insists—even when I pitied you two young dreamers, and was inclined to plead for you, I was silenced by an immutable 'impossible' from both."

"Heaven help me! What can the reason be? And why must I, who am most concerned by it—why must I not know it?" groaned the lover, in a despairing tone.

"I cannot even tell you that. I wish I could," exclaimed Rosamond, with tears starting in her kind, blue eyes.

"But I will know what this mystery is. Dear Mrs. Brooke, forgive me when I say, and mean what I say—that I will know. I know that you sympathize with me, by those gentle tears. Drop no more, dear lady. Be sure that, having her affection and your favor, I will overcome all obstacles that may stand between me and my love. You will let me see dear Berenice before I go?"

"To be sure I will. But, ah, Mr. Vandeleur, my best advice to you is this: When you do go, stay away. Forget Berry, and let her forget you."

"But that would be impossible. I would not if I could. I could not if I would."

"Oh, yes, you can and must. Occupy yourself with something else. You said that you were called home upon important business. I hope it will be interesting enough also to absorb all your thoughts."

"It will be sufficiently interesting, so far as mystery goes," sadly smiled the lover; "for certainly there is something rather mysterious in the manner in which Father Waldemar——"

"Father Waldemar!" exclaimed Rosamond Brooke, with a sudden catching of her breath.

"Yes, madam, Father John Waldemar, formerly parish priest here, as I am told; and now Bishop Waldemar. I do not wonder you should be startled to find that your newest acquaintance and your oldest friend should have been master and pupil for so many years," said Vane, fixing his fine eyes upon Rosamond's face—by which he saw now that she was something more than startled.

She was shocked, overwhelmed. She had not another word to say, but sat panic-stricken, gazing on him.

The unfinished story of Rosamond Brooke's fatal marriage and of Father Waldemar's innocent agency in bringing it about, rushed upon Vane's recollection, and he thought he understood her panic.

He was about to apologize, but he quickly perceived

that Mrs. Brooke wished to conceal her agitation, so he affected not to notice it.

She arose and walked to the window, looked out and uttered some inanities about the weather and then came back to her seat, saying:

"I beg your pardon, you were about to tell me something."

"I was remarking that when I wrote to my old friend to procure proper letters of recommendation for me, telling him at the same time that I wished to use them in proposing for the hand of a lovely young lady of the neighborhood——"

"I beg your pardon, but—did you mention her name to him?"

"Yes, madam, certainly," said Vane, raising his eyebrows in surprise.

"Well—go on. I interrupted you."

"When I had communicated thus much to my correspondent he answered my letter by sending the inclosed credentials, but at the same time imploring me to proceed no further in my purpose until I could go immediately home to him and hear something that he had to communicate upon the subject."

"My ——." In the extremity of her agitation, Rosamond uttered the name of the Most High.

"Madam, I distress you!" exclaimed Vane, in almost equal disturbance, as he looked at her pale and troubled face. "I distress you! I am most unhappy in doing so."

"Hush! never mind; you could not help it," replied Mrs. Brooke, striving and partly controlling her agitation. "Proceed. You said your preceptor conjured you to go no further in your addresses to my daughter, until you should hear something important that he has to tell you, and yet you disobey his injunction and come this morning to seal your engagement. Is that right?"

"Yes, madam, for having your good opinion and her love, I am resolved that nothing on earth will separate me from your daughter. I shall go and hear what my old friend has to say. Very likely he will tell me of some cause existing in my own self, or circumstances, that should prevent my marriage," said Vane, with an in-

credulous smile. "But whatever he may say, it shall not prevent it," he added.

"Do not be too sure of that," observed Mrs. Brooke. "Though for myself, I who am the mother of Berenice, and have examined these credentials of yours, I see nothing which should eventually prevent your marriage. Just now her youth would cause some delay. But what am I talking of? Madam Journey and Berenice have both decided it to be impossible."

"Then the impossible shall come to pass," said Vane, with a grave smile. "And now may I see Berenice?" he inquired.

Mrs. Brooke had not entirely recovered her calmness. She was still pale and trembling.

"You shall see Berenice. I promise you that. But first I want you to see my grandmother. She is not only the mistress of the house and the head of the family, but she has the clearest intellect and the strongest will in it."

"Very well; I will see Mrs. Jernyngham with pleasure."

Rosamond left the room.

Five minutes afterward Mrs. Jernyngham entered.

Vane arose to meet her, and they shook hands with great cordiality.

"Although I hardly know whether to regard you as friend or foe," said the young man, with a smile that seemed to modify his words.

"Regard me as a friend, Mr. Vandeleur. And as most your friend in opposing your marriage with one of our family," replied the old lady, very gravely.

"That will be hard. But I hope your friendship will express itself in a more agreeable manner when you read these letters."

"I am sure that your letters can make no difference. Rosy told me that you wished me to see them."

"And told you nothing more?"

"No."

Here Vane produced the testimonials from three high official dignitaries of city, Church and State.

Madam Journey put on her spectacles and read them with much patience and deliberation.

"They are good. They speak well of you," she said, when she finished them.

Then he showed her the letter from Bishop Waldemar.

She seemed quite as much astonished, though not so much distressed, as Rosamond had been.

"So he was your master in languages in college? And he used to be our pastor here. How strange the rencounters in this world! What has he to tell you, I wonder?"

"I can form no idea upon the subject, madam. But I can assure you of two matters: First, that, whatever the secret is, you shall be made acquainted with it; and, secondly, that it shall not bar my marriage with your lovely granddaughter, if she will accept me."

"Mr. Vandeleur, in the first place, perhaps I do know the secret. If so, when you also hear it you will find out that it must bar your marriage with Berenice Brooke."

"And I tell you, dear lady, with all respect to yourself, that it shall not! Nothing shall! So long as I have the love of Miss Brooke and the approbation of her mother and yourself, nothing under heaven shall separate us. Forgive me for saying this."

"There is nothing to forgive, my poor young friend, but there is much to pity. I do not know whether the matter that Father Waldemar has to communicate to you has anything to do with our family secret. Upon further reflection, I rather think that it has not. I do not see how he could have become acquainted with the story—a story ignorantly surmised and rumored about by several, but perfectly known to only three living persons besides myself—Father Ignatius, old Mr. Basil Wall and Berenice herself."

"Madam," said Vane, a little impatiently, "I have heard overmuch and yet not quite enough of this vague something that, it is insisted, must prevent my union with your fair granddaughter. I have been repeatedly assured that this obstacle exists, but have been forbidden to inquire into its nature. Now I venture respectfully to suggest that, in a matter that so seriously affects my future happiness, and the happiness of one to whom my

whole heart is devoted, I should be made acquainted with all."

"I think so, too," said Madam Journey. "And you shall know it."

"Will you tell me?"

"No, not I; I could not."

"Will Miss Brooke?"

"By no means. It is not a story for her to tell."

"Then Father Ignatius?"

He would not. He most strongly disapproves of the story being kept alive, as he says, by repetition. He will blame me when he finds out that I have told it to Berenice, and authorized its being repeated to you."

"Who, then, will tell it me?"

"Old Mr. Basil Wall."

"I do not know him."

"But you know his nieces. And I will give you a letter of introduction to him, authorizing him to tell you this family history. I will write it to-day. Stay and dine with us, if you have time."

"Thanks, my dear Mrs. Jernyngham. You are my friend now; and I beg your pardon for ever having seemed to doubt it," said Vane, gratefully and penitently.

"Well, now, come into our room. We are all at work there, and it will be pleasanter for you. I will take you in, and then go and order your horse and sleigh put up."

Vane would much rather have remained in the drawing-room if only Madam Journey would be kind enough to have sent Berenice to keep him company. But as it was, he could only feel grateful for the good already granted, and hopeful that fortune might still favor him with a private interview with Berenice. He followed Madam Jorney into the sitting-room, where he was politely greeted by Mrs. Dering, and shyly welcomed by Berenice.

"Mr. Vandeleur will stay and dine with us," said the old lady. And then she left the room to give her orders.

Vane had been too much badgered and bothered in his love affairs to have the least false delicacy left. So, after having talked pleasantly with all the ladies for a little while, he frankly went over to Berenice, and took

his seat by her side, at one of the far-distant front windows.

"Dear love, I want you to read that letter," he said, putting Father Waldemar's epistle into her hands.

She glanced at him inquiringly, and turned to look at the signature. It brought no surprise into her face. She had no recollection of the priest who had left the neighborhood before she had completed her second year. It is doubtful if she ever heard his name, since it was one associated with so deep a tragedy as to be scarcely ever mentioned in the house, and never without pain.

"Your friend wishes you to come and see him before committing yourself by any engagement here?"

"Yes, my beloved, as you see," whispered Vane.

"And you will go?"

"That shall be as my sovereign lady pleases. If she bids me stay, I will disregard the letter and stay. If she bids me go, I will go and hear what the old man has to say. But, in any case, I will return speedily and remain here near her for the rest of my life, or until I can have the happiness of taking her as my bride to my own Southern home."

"Oh, Vane! dear Vane! what sacrifices you are willing to make for me! But how selfish I am in accepting them. Ah! how selfish is my love at its best! But I could not bear to part with you forever. Rather death than such a desolation," she murmured, in a tone so low that her words scarcely reached his ears, and certainly did not penetrate those of others.

"But my beloved," he whispered, "I have told you before that this is no sacrifice; it is the only comfort fate has left me. And I would far rather live in this neighborhood, among strangers, in some old farmhouse, an exile and a bachelor for the rest of my life, to be near you, even though you will not marry me, than to live in the loveliest climes, among the most devoted friends, and marry the fairest woman in the world! But—you don't believe me, Berenice?"

"Oh! I do, I do! And I hear you both in joy and sorrow. Joy, dearest, that you love me so truly! Sorrow, that I have not the moral heroism to send you

away from me, and refuse this offering of all your days," she murmured, in almost fainting tones.

"But you will not call it a sacrifice, when I assure you that it is a consolation! Could I live happily apart from you? Look into your own heart and answer me. Judge my love by your own, and then see whether I do not tell you the truth," he whispered, earnestly.

She turned to him with a radiant brow.

"Oh, Vane! your words make me so happy! They always do that, however! It was your happiness I thought of most, not my own! Oh, Vane! how much I wish I could give you my hand!"

"My dearest, listen. I have had a long talk with your mother, and with Madam Journey. Your mother is favorable to my wishes. Madam Journey is also my friend, though, for the secret reason that you and she know, she is opposed to our union. But this is what I have to say. Madam has decided to make known this mystery to me."

"She will tell you?" exclaimed Berenice, speaking under her breath and in great surprise.

"She thinks that I have a right to know it."

"And so you truly have! But she had told no one but me, and she forbids me to repeat the story even to you. Ah! I was not likely to do it! But she will tell you herself?"

"No, not herself! She will give me a letter to Mr. Basil Wall, authorizing him to give me all information on the subject."

"He knows more than any one else, I believe—more even than Madam Journey knows."

"And now, Berenice, this is what I have to ask: If, when I shall have heard this story, it shall seem to be no obstacle in my eyes, then will you withdraw your refusal to be my wife?"

"Vane, dearest, I cannot reply to that question until you have heard the secret."

"Well, love, I can answer only this: With me it shall be no obstacle."

She looked up at his face with eyes full of tears and a smile full of love, sorrow, gratitude; but she made no reply.

Madam Journey re-entered the room, and accidentally or purposely took a seat rather nearer the lovers than was convenient for their *tête-à-tête*. Then the conversation became general.

Dinner was served at two; and as the afternoons were now very short and the first hours of the evening very dark, because the moon did not rise until nine o'clock, Vane took his leave. He had no chance of a private farewell to Berenice. She stood with all her friends around her when he arose to bid them good-by. He could only press her hand as he took it, and gaze into her eyes, with all his soul in their expression. And then, armed with the letter of introduction to Mr. Basil Wall, he got into his sleigh and started for Stormy Point.

It was a very roundabout route, as the reader already knows. As the bird flies, Stormy Point was distant only about ten miles from Henniker. But it was on the other side of the creek; and the only way to get there was to go four or five miles up stream, cross, and then go four or five miles down stream to the mouth of the creek, and then turn and run ten miles down the shore of the bay to the Point.

Vandeleur did all this in about two hours, and reached the Point at early candlelight, just as the Hail Maries had put the supper on the table.

"Here you are!" cordially exclaimed the old captain, rushing out at the sound of the sleigh bells, and lifting up both arms in his joyous welcome. "By George, how I've missed you to-day! I say, the old house looks jolly with its red firelight shining through the windows—don't it, now? I never like the old place better than when I'm coming home to it on a cold winter night, with the snow on the ground outside and the firelight shining redly through the window inside. But come in before you say another word. It's sharp, talking out here in the cold, and Pinky Skinner has got roast pheasants for supper; and if we don't get in to the table in time to eat them hot, her tongue will be a little sharper than the frost. So don't say another word, but come right in."

Now, of course, Vane had not said one word yet. The old man had done all the talking for both.

"Here, Boobydebil, come take this horse and sleigh

around to the stables," roared the captain. And an old negro man, whom Vane had never seen before, came running from some obscure corner, and took the reins as Vane left the sleigh.

"Here, take your hat and coat off in the hall, and come right in to supper. Don't delay to go up to your room. Do as the cat does. Don't wash your hands till after meals."

"Please, may I speak now?" laughed Vane, as, having relieved himself of his outer garments, they were about to enter the warm supper-room.

"Yes, of course; who hinders you?"

"Well, then, who, or what, on earth is Boobydebil?"

"My old manservant, whom some insane sponsor in baptism named after Bobadilla, but whom the natives have named Boobydebil."

"Bobadilla?" inquired Vane, in perplexity.

"Yes, the old curse who once governed Hispaniola, and who sent Christopher Columbus to Spain in chains, you know. Here we are!"

They were in the warm, lighted room, in the midst of which stood the cheerful supper-table, with its smoking delicacies. All the captain's household were assembled, and they all cordially greeted the returning guest and welcomed him back again.

They gathered around the table, and the captain, not having the fear of Pinky Skinner before his eyes, made many inquiries concerning the ladies of Henniker, all of which were satisfactorily answered by Vane.

Presently, however, the guest startled his host and everybody else by suddenly inquiring:

"Is it too late for me to make a call on Mr. Basil Wall?"

"What? Say that over again!" exclaimed the captain, who had heard the question, but really did not believe his own ears.

"I asked if it was too late for me to make a call on Mr. Basil Wall."

"Why, man alive, what should take you to see him at this hour of the night?" inquired the old man, in astonishment.

"It is scarcely six o'clock, and my time is so short

here that I would like to see him to-night, so as to save a day if possible."

"But you are not acquainted with Mr. Wall, so how can you have such pressing business with him?" bluntly demanded the captain.

"I am the bearer of a letter from Mrs. Jernyngham to Mr. Wall, and my business with him is really so urgent, and my time, as I said, so short, that I should like, if possible, to see him to-night. You know the distance and the roads, and the habits of the family, and you can tell me whether this would be practicable for me or convenient for them."

"Let me see. Bless me, it's a great bore, your going away again to-night, just when I wanted a game of euchre," said the captain, breaking away from the question at issue to complain of his own individual grievance, as many people do. But the anxious face of Vane recalled him.

"Well, yes, I suppose you can go if you must, late as it is. Our Maryland doors are open to visitors as long as we are out of bed, and afterward, too, for that matter. Basil Wall's is eight miles from here, and the roads are good. If you take the same little sleigh that you have been using, and a fresh horse, and start within ten minutes, you will get there in an hour—that is, a little after seven o'clock. That will not be too late to pay a visit when the motive is important. And you will have three hours to transact your business, whatever it may be, as old Basil never goes to bed before ten."

"Then," said Vane, rising from the table, "I must trouble you to give me plain directions as to the road."

"Oh, you would never find it from my direction. It is cut up into twenty cross-roads. I will send Boobydebil with you."

"Many thanks; but will not that be very inconvenient?"

"Not at all, in regard to Boobydebil. The only bore is not having you here to take the fourth hand at euchre."

"I'm sorry, but——" inquired Vane, mischievously, "could not Miss Pinky take the fourth hand?"

"Blast Miss Pinky!" exclaimed the captain, gallantly

—but under his breath, although Miss Skinner was certainly at a safe distance.

"Could not Miss Halcyone fill the place?" pursued Vane.

"Halcyone! Blest if I know what's come over her ever since she came back from Hourie Hall. I do believe some hydrophobic must have bitten her, and she's going melancholy mad. She's as solemn as an owl, and as cross as a cat. She plays recklessly, and don't seem to know the right bower from the deuce of nothing. Don't tell me about Halcyone. I think I'll send her away somewhere for change of scene—to old Basil's, to visit Fulvia and Flavia. No, I shall just have to give up my game for this evening. And the worst of it is that it is the last evening I shall have with you, too."

"I don't know that," said Vane, good-naturedly; "and besides, though I leave the neighborhood for a week or so, I mean to come back to remain."

"Oh, you do, do you? Then I hope you will make Stormy Point your home."

"If you can accommodate me, I shall do so with great pleasure!"

"Hurrah! then it's a bargain."

During this short conversation, they had passed into the hall, where Vane hastily resumed his greatcoat, hat, and gloves.

And by the time he was ready, Harry, who had gone out to order the sleigh with a fresh horse, returned to say that he was waiting at the door.

With sincere thanks to his kind host, Vane once more bade him good-night, and took his seat in the sleigh, beside Bobadilla, who held the reins.

"Mind, if the old fellow wants you to stay all night, you needn't trouble about Boobydebil and the sleigh. You can keep them or send them back, just exactly as you please," said the captain, just as Vane started.

The young man lifted his hat in acknowledgment, and the sleigh flew off.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CENTENARIAN.

Though near a century old, he still retained
His manly sense and energy of mind.
Virtuous and wise he was; but not severe,
For he remembered that he once was young;
His easy presence checked no harmless joy.
—ARMSTRONG.

The sleigh flew over the frozen snow and under the starlit sky at such a rate that the ice-clad trees flashed, whirling, reeling backward, like a mad dance of fairies; at such a rate that conversation was impracticable and breathing difficult. Their way lay back from the coast toward the interior. The road was much better than any Vane had yet seen in the neighborhood. It took them through a deep forest all sheathed in ice, that gleamed dimly in the starlight, like the steel armor and lances of the knights of old.

For an hour they flew on at a breathless rate, and then, in the midst of the forest, came to a clearing, to some old fields and orchards, and a garden, and then to an old-fashioned farmhouse, with a very steep roof and very tall chimneys, and big doors and windows. The windows were lighted from the fires within, and gave the same inviting aspect to the place as that which Vane had found at every other house he had seen in Maryland.

The sleigh drew up before the broad front door, that was sheltered by a stoop covered all over its roof with climbing rose-vines, now leafless, but sheathed, like the forest trees, in ice, and fruited with icicles.

Bobadilla got down and knocked loudly with his fist, for want of a harder knocker. Vane followed him more leisurely.

The door was opened by Fulvia.

"Why, Bobadilla, how do you do? How is your master and all at the Point? Is anything the matter?" she asked, in some surprise and anxiety.

"It's the young gemman, miss, that's all," answered Bobadilla.

"Good-evening, Miss Wall. I do not wonder you are surprised to see us at this hour," said Vane, coming up; "but the fact is——"

"Oh, Mr. Vandeleur, is that you? I'm very glad to see you. Come in; uncle will be pleased to make your acquaintance, I am sure," she said, cordially, holding out her hand.

"I ought to apologize for making you so late a visit, but——"

"Lor', Mr. Vandeleur, don't say a word. I assure you I am really very glad to see you, indeed; so will Flavia be. And as for uncle, he'll be delighted. He always is to see pleasant company. You know it is a God-send to him, bless his dear old soul. He don't get out much this weather. He is so old—almost a hundred years old. And just as happy as ever he can be. I am sure you will be pleased with him."

"I am sure that I have been delighted with every member of this family that I have had the good fortune to meet," said Vane, gallantly.

"Oh, we younger ones are plain country folk. It is uncle who is an angel, and a prince, and a duck, and everything that is good. Now hurry in. Never mind dusting the snow off. I declare it is snowing again, isn't it? Bobadilla, you take the horse and sleigh around in the stable and put them up. And don't forget to give the horse a warm mash and a rub-down, and cover him with a blanket, after such a cold drive; and then you go to the kitchen and I will come and give you something hot and comfortable for yourself, do you hear?" said the young girl, whose kind heart never let her forget the wants of any creatures, high or low, human or brute who might need her attention.

The man touched his hat, and left the door, to do her bidding.

"You see we have but few servants here, Mr. Vandeleur, and so I have to make Bobadilla wait on himself; but he is such a good old creature that he won't mind it, bless his dear old soul," said Fulvia, as she stood in the hall beside Vane while he took off his hat and overcoat.

"And yet they call him Booby devil!" laughed Vane.

"Oh, that's a corruption of his name. They always spoil names so, hereabouts. I know the sweetest little child that ever was born, and her name is Violet, which suits her, love her dear little heart; and they call her Viley, and even Vile, for short."

"Oh! that's atrocious!"

"It is sacrilegious!"

Fulvia opened the door leading into a snug room, warmed by a bright fire. She drew an easy-chair up before it, saying:

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable, Mr. Vandeleur, and I will go and tell uncle that you are here. I know that he will be as pleased as possible to make your acquaintance. And I am sure you will like him so much that you will never forget him; he is the dearest old gentleman!"

Thus babbling her little benevolences, for "out of the abundance of her heart," she spoke, Fulvia went away.

Vane left to himself, looked around with something of the idle curiosity a stranger feels in finding himself the sole occupant of a new room.

But the room, new to the visitor, was old in itself; and there were signs of frugality, if not of poverty, in all its appointments. The homemade carpet that covered the floor was faded and patched. A window pane wanted here and there was supplied by a clean piece of newspaper, pasted neatly in its place. The old chairs and tables of walnut were worn smooth of all angles. The blinds of the windows were of blue wallpaper. The easy-chairs were covered with old leather, much worn by usage. The glass over the mantelpiece was dimmed with age.

Yet throughout the place was an atmosphere of care, cleanliness and comfort that was very pleasing.

Vane had not time to notice half the attractive features of this very unpretentious apartment, when the door opened, and Fulvia and Flavia entered, leading in between them the venerable Basil Wall.

Vane arose.

A most reverend and imposing figure was that of the aged man who now stood in the presence of the visitor. He was very tall and very thin, and slightly stooping, yet

more from the grace of courtesy than from the weakness of age. His features were clearly cut and noble in outline; his skin was very wrinkled, but his complexion was very fair and roseate, and his blue eyes were as clear and pure as those of infancy. The top of his head was quite bald, clean and shining; but from the sides and back, long, white, soft silvery locks flowed down upon his neck and shoulders and mingled with the long silvery beard that rested on his breast.

He was dressed with much care and neatness. He wore snow-white, spotless linen, and an old, threadbare but well-brushed suit of black broadcloth. He came forward, lightly leaning on the shoulder of Fulvia, and smiling to greet his visitor.

Vane arose and bowed with more reverence before this aged patriarch than he would have felt in the presence of the greatest monarch on earth.

Old Basil Wall held out his hand, saying, smilingly:

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Vandeleur. I have heard of you with some interest from my niece here. Sit down again and make yourself comfortable. It is a cold night."

"Thanks, but I should first apologize for making this unexpected visit."

"You should do no such thing, my young friend. You are very welcome! Visitors are not such frequent blessings on cold winter nights to our lonely country-house, that we are not to be thankful to them when they do come. I beg you will sit down again," said the old man, gracefully waving his hand toward the visitor's vacated chair.

Vane, seeing that his host was standing, and would continue to stand as long as he himself should do so, smiled and bowed and resumed his seat.

Old Basil Wall and his nieces then drew chairs around the fire and seated themselves.

"I should not have presumed to intrude upon a stranger at this hour of the evening," began the visitor; but the host politely interrupted him:

"Say no more of that I beg you. You are very welcome. We are very glad to see you."

Vane bowed and continued, as if nothing had been said to interrupt his speech:

"But that I am the bearer of a letter from Mrs. Jernyngham, of Henniker, which I thought it necessary to deliver at once, as my time here is very short."

"Ah!" said the old gentleman, taking the letter that was handed by Vane, and holding it unopened while he spoke:

"You are going to leave us? I am very sorry! I had hoped to have acquired a permanent as well as a pleasant acquaintance in you."

"You are very kind. Believe me, Mr. Wall, the wish for a better acquaintance is mutual, and, as I hope to return and to remain in this neighborhood for some time, I trust it will be gratified."

"Oh, we shall indeed be very happy to have you for a neighbor. You left the ladies of Henniker well?"

"Very well, thank you. Madam Journey's letter——"

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed the old gentleman, opening the epistle in question and beginning to read it.

Vane watched him with much interest, and saw that as he read his face changed and he became very grave and anxious. He finished and folded the letter and put it in his pocket, and then sat with his hands upon his knees and his head upon his breast until his silvery beard swept down to his waist. He sat thus for some minutes in silence, and seemingly in troubled thought, while Vane watched him anxiously, and the two young girls glanced at him uneasily.

At length Fulvia ventured to inquire:

"Dear uncle, is there anything the matter?"

"No, my dear, nothing to trouble you. It is a little commission that Mrs. Jernyngham has intrusted to me, and that concerns our visitor here," said the old gentleman. Then, turning courteously to Vane, he added: "You will remain all night with us? Nay, it is absolutely necessary that you should do so, if I am to comply with my friend, Mrs. Jernyngham's request."

Vane bowed and smiled his thanks and acceptance of the invitation. Then the old gentleman turned to his nieces and said:

"Fulvia, my love, go and have a fire lighted in the spare room for our friend, and see also that his horse and servant are well taken care of this cold night. And Flavia, dear, brew a big jug of mulled cider, and bring it here to warm us."

The young girls immediately left the room to obey the commands of their uncle, who, when alone with his guest, turned to him and said:

"Two good children, sir; two very good children. My great-grandnieces; though that is such a lengthened-out relationship that I simply call them my nieces; and I love them both as my children, of course."

"They are both very lovely," added Vane.

"And now, my young friend, you know, of course, the purport of this letter?" said Mr. Wall, drawing the epistle from his pocket.

Vane smiled.

"Of course I do, sir."

"You have seen it, perhaps?"

"Only the outside."

"Then read it now. And after you have done so we can better enter upon its subject," said old Basil Wall, handing over the paper.

Vane unfolded it and read—with a somewhat heightened color as he came to his own name in connection with his suit to Berenice.

HEN ATICER HOUSE, Saturday Morning.

MY DEAR OLD FRIEND: This will be handed you by Mr. Vane Vandeleur, whose shipwreck on our shores has made his name so well known to all the neighbors around, that you could not have failed to hear of him, even if your dear girls had not spent an evening in his company at Hourie Hall. Mr. Vandeleur has done us the honor to propose for the hand of our child Berenice. He has presented such testimonials of good standing in his own community as should recommend him to our respect even if his personal merits had not already won our warmest regard. But you know the reasons why I think that, after this, no daughter of our house should ever marry. I write now to ask you to take upon yourself the painful task of putting him in possession of these reasons. You know the whole of our family history—known to so few. You have seen five generations of our family, and are witness to the fatality that has followed it. Tell the young stranger all—all. He can be trusted, I feel sure.

Your affectionate friend,

DOROTHY JERNYNGHAM.

Vane finished this letter and returned it to Mr. Wall, who replaced it in his pocket.

Vane looked anxiously toward the old gentleman, who, with his hands folded and his head bent, remained in silence that the young man forbore to interrupt.

At length Mr. Wall spoke:

"It is a long, sorrowful story. But I should preface it by saying that I do not believe in any supernatural cause for the events that have occurred. It may be a chain of coincidences only, or there may be a perfectly natural cause, although we may not know what it is. There are many things in life, sir, that seem supernatural, until explained by science. This strange family history may be one of these things."

Here the old man paused, and again fell into thought.

Eagerness, anxiety, intense interest were expressed in every lineament of Vandeleur's speaking face. But the old man continued still silent, as if engaged in collecting and marshaling his thoughts.

At length the sisters returned to the room—Fulvia bearing a waiter on which stood a couple of large glasses, two plates and a cake basket full of seed cakes; and Flavia with a large covered pitcher, from which steamed the fragrant aroma of mulled cider. Fulvia held her waiter while Flavia sat the pitcher down before the fire to be kept hot, and then ran and brought a little, round table and placed it on the rug between Basil Wall and his guest. The girls then arranged the plates and glasses upon it, and then looked up at the old man as if for further directions.

"That will do, my darlings; I want nothing more for the present," said Mr. Wall.

"All is ready for Mr. Vandeleur, when he wishes to go to his room, uncle. It is the large one back of yours," said Fulvia.

"Quite right, my dear; but our guest will not want to retire for three hours yet. It is but half-past seven."

"You will find this mulled cider better than usual, uncle. It is made from some Miss Pinky Skinner sent over to-night by the old colored man who drove Mr. Vandeleur," said Flavia.

"Is it? Then it must be good, for they certainly make

the best cider in the county at Storms'—though, to be sure, they also raise the best apples there for that purpose. It was very kind of Pinky to send it, and I thank her very much."

"And, uncle—I mulled it!"

"You did, my darling? Then it is perfect, I know."

"Uncle," put in Flavia, frankly, "do you wish us to remain here or not?"

"No, my dears, I wish you to go into the back parlor and stay there until I want you. But how will you amuse yourself this long, dismal winter evening?"

"Oh, uncle, we shall sew on our pretty patchwork silk quilt that we are determined to send to the Industrial Fair to compete for the prize next summer," said Flavia.

"And besides, uncle, Pike Turner promised to be back again to-night, and he will be sure to come; and he can sit with us and tell us stories of his wild life in the West, you know. I had rather sit down and listen to his thrilling adventures among the wolves and bears and the still more savage and ferocious redskins than read any novel I ever saw," said Fulvia.

"Well, I hope he will come, for your sakes, my dears; but it is a terrible night—snowing fast again!" exclaimed the old gentleman, raising his eyes to the windows against which the thick, white shower was sifting down through the darkness.

"Come? To be sure, he will come. Bless his darling old heart! when did he ever fail to keep his word through any sort of weather?" said Fulvia, very warmly.

"Quite right, my love. Now, you and your sister may go and leave me with my guest here. We have some business to transact."

"I feel quite like a culprit," said Vane, "in being the cause of banishing these young ladies."

"You are not doing so, my dear young friend. The back parlor is their special sitting-room, where they keep their worktables and pet cats, and other feminine belongings. I usually pass my evenings with them there, dozing in my easy-chair, for want of something better to do. To-night Pike Turner will take my place and be better company, as, instead of dozing, he will tell them sensational stories."

The girls kissed their hands, and, laughing, left the room.

"Good girls! good girls, Mr. Vandeleur! The greatest comforts I have in this world—though I have many, blessed be the Lord!" reverently added the old man.

Vandeleur bowed assent.

Mr. Wall lifted the pitcher of mulled cider from the hearth and filled two tumblers, and handed one to his guest, saying:

"Take it, Mr. Vandeleur. It will do you good, this cold night. And, besides, it is very palatable."

"It is delicious," said Vane, sipping for the first time the favorite local beverage.

"It is my only dissipation, Mr. Vandeleur."

"A most innocent one, I am sure," said Vane, setting down his empty glass.

"Yes, yes; if nothing stronger than this were habitually drunk, life would be longer, and the list of ills shorter," added the old gentleman, as he also put down his empty glass, and set the covered pitcher nearer the fire to keep its contents hot against the time they would want to replenish their tumblers.

"And now for the story. You will think that I am telling you a tale out of some middle-age romance; but it is, in point of fact, a portion of the history of the province."

"I am all attention," said Vane, almost breathlessly.

"Listen, then," said old Basil Wall, drawing his chair nearer to his guest.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TALE TOLD BY NIGHT.

"Listen noble stranger now,
Awful hands have marked thy brow."

Here the patriarch told the story of that proud first lady of the manor, who, having been left a young and wealthy widow, with an only daughter, set her affections upon the bravest, handsomest and most distinguished cavalier of the Provincial Court; how for a while he became her frequent guest and amused himself in her society until, on one fatal day, he confided to her the secret of his private marriage with the beautiful daughter of an Indian chief, and thus aroused her fiercest passions of jealousy and revenge, so that, in a mad attempt to destroy her rival, she accidentally poisoned her lover; and thus drew down the bitter curse of the young Indian widow—the curse of widowhood upon the lady of the manor and her daughters forever.

"And you believe this legend?" inquired Vane.

"I know not what to believe of the legend. The proofs of its truth, if any ever existed, are lost in the mists of the past. But I know that the fate of widowhood has followed the family relentlessly for seven generations."

"Strange! most strange! But, go on, sir!"

"The first lady of the manor never married again. She who is said to have been so great a sinner is also reputed to have ended her life as a great saint. She founded the Church of St. Rosalie, with all its dependencies. And she devoted her only daughter to a convent. The girl, however, had a will of her own——"

"Like her mother!" put in Vane.

"Exactly. And so she ran away from her convent, and married the young heir of the Lord Proprietary."

"And what next?"

"She was the first heiress of the curse. Within a year her young husband was mysteriously murdered and she was left a childlike widow with an infant daughter.

Some said this was the judgment of Heaven upon the unholy marriage; others affirmed that it was the vengeance of Eagle Eye, the lonely old chief of the Pocomocoes, carrying out his daughter's malediction. The youthful widow considered it the punishment of her sin in breaking her conventual vows. She was overwhelmed with grief and remorse. She became almost as great a penitent and devotee as her mother was. She humbled herself before the church she had offended, and, after a long time, she was forgiven and received back into its communion. She took her infant daughter, a posthumous child born some weeks after its father's death, whom she called Magdalene, in memory of her own repentance, and she went down to Henniker and joined her lady mother.

"There the two women led a recluse life, devoting themselves to prayer, penance, alms-giving, and, lastly, to the education of the little Magdalene Calvert. In their zeal they would have devoted this child also to a convent, but she was a member of the Lord Proprietary's family, though a distant one, and she was the heiress of a very large estate; so both the Orphan's Court and the powerful Calvert clan had a great deal to do with her destiny. They would not permit her to be placed in a convent. Nevertheless, she was brought up very strictly by her educators. I remember Magdalene, or Maidlen, as she was called in brief; I remember her well," said the old man, musingly.

"You!" exclaimed Vane, in surprise; for they seemed to be speaking of such long-past provincial history.

"Yes, I remember her; so you see that I have come down to my day at last. Oh! I have known Henniker a long time; but then, you see, I am near a century old! Yes! I remember Maidlen well; the loveliest of all the lovely ladies of her line. She was then what our young Berenice is now!" said old Basil Wall, with enthusiasm.

"Then she must have been beautiful, indeed!" assented Berry's lover, with much fervor.

"This sweet Maidlen grew up as amiable and intellectual as she was beautiful. That gentleman of her deceased father's family, who had been appointed as one of her guardians by the decision of the Orphan's Court, as

a check upon the fanaticism of her mother's family, would not consent that she should be doomed to take the veil. This being the case, her mother did the next best thing she could. She educated her daughter with the greatest strictness of discipline, told her of the malediction that justly or unjustly followed her family; and so she ever shadowed that young life with superstitious gloom."

"But where was her guardian all this time, that he did not interfere?" inquired Vane.

"At the court of the Lord Proprietary. However, when Maidlen was twenty years of age, and within a year of her majority, when she would come into the actual possession of her large estates, her guardian, who was, I believe, also her great-uncle, came down to see her. Perceiving, from the influence around the girl, that, if some wholesome change were not made in her way of life, that she would, of her own accord, as soon as she should become of age, go into a convent, and that such a change must be made while he yet had power over her person, he took her back with him on a visit to her relatives in St. Mary's City. There her condition was so completely changed, that from being one of the most secluded of recluses, she became the most brilliant belle at the gay court of the Lord Proprietary."

"A natural reaction," murmured Vane.

"And yet she retained all her truth and goodness. The death of her grandmother, at an advanced age, and who, by the way, died in an odor of sanctity, brought her back to Henniker House for a season; but she was never brought to the gloomy asceticism that had darkened her youth. After the year of mourning expired, she went again to St. Mary's City, accompanied by her mother. On the elder lady, also, the change of scene produced a wholesome effect. She went with her daughter much into society, and was much elated by the admiration everywhere bestowed upon the lovely Maidlen. Indeed, the change that came over both mother and daughter was quite wonderful."

"The removal of the guilty woman and gloomy fanatic who had darkened their lives, no doubt helped this very much."

"Yes, I think so, too. Mrs. Calvert was even induced

to tolerate a suitor to her daughter, when that suitor was also one of the most distinguished young men in the province. But she could not at once get over the terror of the curse. It will, perhaps, amaze you, Mr. Vandeleur, to hear that these two women, mother and daughter, being then of sound and well-cultivated minds, before giving a final answer to this suitor, actually did make a secret pilgrimage to the Indian village of Pocomoco to inquire into the matter of the malediction, and to consult an Indian medicine-man magician on the subject. This is one of the incidents that can be vouched for, though you may be scarcely able to credit it."

"Why not? Do I not see the same superstition working on this present day, and on the minds of two of the most intelligent women I ever knew?" said Vane, a little impatiently.

"Ay, Mrs. Jernyngham and Miss Brooke, both believe in the malediction and dread its doom," slowly and thoughtfully replied the old man.

"But proceed, sir, if you please. What came of the ladies' visit to the Indian village?"

"A most important revelation, or prediction—call it which you please. The 'Eagle Eye'—the old chief—was long since dead. The son, 'Dead Shot,' was absent on a hunting expedition. But 'Long Sight,' an Indian seer of fabulous age and wonderful wisdom, was sunning himself in his wigwam door. Him the pilgrims consulted, and his answer was as obscure and impossible of fulfillment as any oracle ever uttered of old! Have you chanced to hear of it?"

"Never!"

"It has been handed down, however, to the present time. As it has been interpreted and translated, it stands thus—and you will say when you hear it, that it is enough to confound the calculation of any common mind:

'When the noon shall be midnight,
And evening be morn;
And the child shall be christened
Before it is born;—

'When the maid shall be widowed
Before she is wed,
Then the nun shall be pardoned,
The curse shall be dead.'

"You may imagine, Mr. Vandeleur, that the chain of impossible contingencies threw the mother and daughter into the deepest despair. They returned to St. Mary's City, and, after some days of intense suffering, sent for the impatient suitor and confided to him the conditions and the curse. Being of a strong mind and joyous spirit, he laughed at both. So fine and wholesome was his influence over both women, that he brought them over to his views, and he married Maidlen Calvert. It was in her bridal dress as she left the church on the arm of her handsome bridegroom, and followed by a long train of bridesmaids, that I saw her for the first time. I was a bit of a boy then, knocked about among the spectators; but I know, as I thought of the malediction and looked at her, I felt as if, had I been a man, I would like to be cursed in the same way, and have that beautiful woman for a bride, if I had to die for it before the year was out."

"I hope that he did not," ventured Vane.

"Ay, but he did!" said Basil Wall, solemnly.

"Eight months after the marriage, one night when she was sitting up late waiting for his return, and wondering why he, who never stayed out so late before, should be gone so long now, his dead body was suddenly brought home to her by the constables. It had been found in the streets. There was no visible cause for his death, no mark of violence whatever upon his person. And a subsequent post-mortem examination showed no disorganization within. The cause of his sudden death remained an impenetrable mystery."

"The whole chain of incidents is a mystery, it seems to me," sighed Vane.

"It is. Well, I was about to say: The shock of her husband's sudden death proved fatal to the lovely young widow. She was seized with the pangs of premature labor, and gave birth to twins—a boy and a girl. The boy lived only to be baptized, and then died. The young mother survived but a few hours, and expired. She was buried with her baby on her bosom. All this happened within eight months after the fatal marriage. The surviving twin, the little, delicate girl, was adopted by the broken-hearted mother of Maidlen, and most tenderly

brought up. She taught the babe to call her mother, and the little Dorothy never knew her otherwise. Mrs. Calvert died when Dorothy was about eighteen years of age. On her deathbed she confided the family secret to the keeping of her daughter, as she always called the girl, and she enjoined her, with her last dying breath, never to continue the curse by marrying."

"And the fair Dorothy obeyed the solemn injunction, of course," said Vane with a sort of sad irony.

"She obeyed it for a time, indeed. She had many suitors, but rejected them all, until the frank and gallant sailor, Captain Jernyngham met her in society and fell in love with her. You have seen his portrait—what a very handsome and attractive man he was, even on canvas. Judge, if you please, of his attractions, with that face and form lighted up with life and love. Dorothy could not withstand him. She loved him to distraction. She told him her story and left the issue with him. He, like his predecessor, laughed the curse to scorn! He said that the deaths of the two former men were mere coincidences; that in wild and unsettled times and places men were liable to sudden and violent death; that he himself was a sailor, and might at any time find a watery grave without anybody taking the trouble to curse him into it."

"So they were married?"

"Yes; and Father Ignatius who performed the ceremony, and who was the spiritual guide of both, enjoined them never more to mention the malediction, but to let the very memory of it die out. And from that moment the matter was hushed up. You know the rest of their story, Mr. Vandeleur."

CHAPTER XXII.

VANE'S LAST RESOLVE.

Now if your resolution be like mine,
We yet will give our sorrows a brave end.
Justice is for us, so may fortune be,
And weave bright proof of her inconstancy.
—CROUN'S DARIUS.

"I have heard," answered Vane, "how Captain Jernyngham was killed in a sea fight."

"And so seemed to follow the fate of his predecessor in coming to a violent death within a year after his marriage."

"Yes."

"But you have not heard, perhaps, that instead of falling in a fair fight with his country's foes, he was traitorously shot by one of his own crew, a half-breed Indian, who was supposed to have taken advantage of the *mêlée* on deck to do the dreadful deed?"

"Good Heaven, no! I never heard that! Was the murderer brought to justice?"

"There was no time for that. But speedy retribution followed the fellow. He was killed a few minutes after his crime in the same sea fight."

"Did Madam Jernyngham know that?"

"No one knew it for a certainty; and assuredly, as the half-breed who was said to have done the deed was already dead, there was no reason why the suspicion should be brought to the knowledge of the captain's widow, to augment the sorrow that was even then almost unsupportable. Her husband fell in the sea fight. Such was the bulletin brought to her."

"Then the traitorous murder was but a suspicion?"

"It was but too probably a fact. Look you, my young friend! It occurs to me, while I am recalling the incidents of the family history, that there was nothing at all unaccountable in it, taken as a whole. It appears to me that the sons of the 'Eagle Eye,' from generation to generation, have taken care to carry down and execute his

daughter's curse. Recollect. Benedict Calvert, who married the daughter of Lady Henniker, was found dead in the wood with an arrow sticking in his body. Is it not probable that the shaft was sped from an Indian bow? Then, the husband of Maidlen Calvert was found dead in the street. Is it not possible that he too died by Indian treachery? It is almost certain that Captain Jernyngham met his death in the manner I have described. And there is not the shadow of a doubt that Colonel Dering was killed by an Indian warrior, who singled him out in the skirmish.

"Then, as I said before, it is probably a one-sided vendetta, handed down from father to son. If so, it must soon die out, if it is not already dead! The Indians have long since disappeared from this neighborhood. Even if Colonel Dering came to his death among them, as I suppose there is no question but that he did, still it was on the frontier; it was not here that he met his fate. But—his successor—his son-in-law, if he had lived to know a son-in-law, the father of Berenice! I confess that I have been, and I am, more anxious to know his history and fate than those of all his predecessors put together! What of Mr. Raphael Brooke?" gravely demanded Vandeleur.

But this name was no sooner mentioned than the countenance of the old man grew troubled.

"I would to Heaven," he said, "that I had not to tell you this story! I could tell you all the horrors that preceded it, because they belonged to a remote period, and their sanguine coloring is faded by time. But his story is comparatively one of to-day! Its memory is fresh in my mind! Ah, my young friend! We can all of us read of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the martyrdoms of Smithfield, with much less painful emotion than we can hear of the last steamboat explosion or railway collision. And thus it was less trying to me to speak of the guilt and sorrow of the past, than of the tragedy of the present."

"I am very sorry to give you this pain. Believe me, I would not do so if I could help it. Yet this tragedy is not quite of to-day, either! It was some eighteen or twenty years since," said Vane.

"And yet it seems but yesterday. From your words I should judge that you already know something of that story."

"Only that Mr. Brooke was introduced to the ladies of Henniker by their parish priest, Father John Waldemar, on the occasion of a party given in honor of Miss Dering's birthday; that, being vouched for by Father Waldemar, he subsequently married Miss Dering, with the approbation of all her relations and friends. And that some three months after their marriage, some awful calamity put a sudden end to their union. But of the precise nature of that calamity I have never been told—every one who has mentioned the subject to me has only alluded to it in a sort of horror, and then shrank away from it entirely."

"May I ask who has ever mentioned it to you?"

"Only two persons, I think. Captain Storms——"

"Who knows very little about it," put in the old man.

"And an aged servant of Mrs. Jernyngham——"

"Who knows less. I was present when the arrest was made."

"The arrest!" echoed Vane, in astonishment.

"Yes; and it was as privately made as was possible. It was about three months after their marriage, I think. They had returned from their wedding tour, and were making a visit at Henniker House, previous to going to Raphael Brooke's own home, near Charleston, in South Carolina. A large company of friends and neighbors had been invited to meet them, and were then staying in the house."

"Yes," said Vane anxiously, seeing that old Basil Wall paused.

"There was a great deal of festivity, of course. One fine day a riding party had been arranged. The gentlemen and ladies were all mounted on fine horses and were laughing and talking together, and making their horses prance and caper before the door, while the groom had ridden on to open the inner gate——"

"Well?" breathlessly urged Vane.

"At that moment a carriage came slowly up the avenue and stopped before the door. All the mounted party drew aside to make way for the carriage, and remained

looking in some little curiosity for its occupants. There appeared four men in the vehicle. And the curiosity of the company was greatly increased, when, on these alighting, it was discovered that they were all four strangers in the neighborhood. The elder and more gentlemanly-looking of the party advanced toward the spot where Raphael Brooke sat on his horse, holding the bridle of his wife's skittish little mare.

"'It is the sheriff of my native county,' said Mr. Brooke, immediately recognizing the stranger.

"And when that stranger reached his side, Raphael Brooke greeted him gayly and frankly, with certainly no shadow of the coming woe—no slightest suspicion of the sheriff's errand crossing his mind.

"'This is Mr. Horatio Wardloe, my love, one of my mother's oldest neighbors and for many years sheriff of my native county,' he said, presenting that officer to Rosamond; and added, 'My wife, sir.'

"The sheriff bowed low, and seemed pained and embarrassed.

"'I am very glad to see you here so unexpectedly, Mr. Wardloe; but may I ask what important business has brought you so far from home?' smiled the unconscious young man.

"'Yes. Will you dismount and give me a private interview?' inquired the officer, glancing uneasily at the young wife.

"'Well, yes, I can, I suppose, if the business is urgent. But, you see, we are all mounted for a canter down by the waterside. May not your business wait a few hours? And will you not go into the house and rest, and take some refreshments in the meantime? I am sure Mrs. Jernyngham will be glad to see you or any friend of mine, and will make you and your companions heartily welcome. And, by the way, introduce those—gentlemen, to me," he added, hesitating how to designate them as he glanced doubtfully at the questionable party of men who remained grouped near the carriage.

"'It does not need,' gravely replied the sheriff, 'nor have I time to accept your proffered hospitality. I must trouble you, if you please, to accompany me to some

place near at hand, where I can have a word with you in private.'

"'Here's with you, then,' gayly and good-humoredly replied the young man, throwing himself from his horse, and joining the importunate visitor.

"As they walked away together, some words were wafted toward us by the light wind. The sheriff was saying to Mr. Brooke:

"'You will be shocked, I fear, when you know the errand upon which I come, and you will be surprised also, perhaps, that I, of all men, should undertake it. But I chose to come in person so as to save you as much as possible of the inevitable pain.'

"'In the name of Heaven, Mr. Wardloe, of what pain do you——,' began the young man; but here their voices passed out of hearing, as they entered the house together.

"Meanwhile the mounted company waited. There was a general hum and buzz of conversation and conjecture. The sheriff's voice might have met other ears than mine. At all events, there now began to prevail a general impression that something was very wrong; that the new comers were the bearers of very bad news; that some great calamity had happened. Several members of the company, tired of waiting, dismounted and walked back to the house, and lingered in groups about the porch. Rosamond Brooke rode up to my side. She looked pale and anxious.

"'Mr. Wall,' she inquired, 'what ails everybody. What has happened.'

"'My dear, I do not know. Nothing serious, I hope,' was the reply.

"'Help me off my horse, and take me into the house,' she requested.

"I complied with her wishes, and led her in."

CHAPTER XXIII.

TERRIBLE CHARGE.

Oh horror's head
Horrors accumulate.—SHAKESPEARE.

"We passed through groups of marveling visitors and whispering servants that were gathered in the hall, and we entered the drawing-room. Madam Journey and some of her guests were there, waiting and wondering what the matter could be; but neither Mr. Raphael Brooke nor the sheriff were visible.

"'What has happened, grandma? Why do these strange men come here? What are all the people putting their heads together about? You are all keeping something from me, grandma!' exclaimed Rosamond Brooke, very anxiously.

"'No, my dear, I am keeping nothing from you; for I know nothing myself of this business.'

"'But this Mr. Wardloe has brought some bad news; I know it by the way he looked.'

"'I trust not, my dear. Mr. Brooke has no near relative to die, and nothing but death could be such very bad news, you know,' said Madam Journey, consolingly.

"But the good lady was much mistaken. There may be misfortunes that would make death a blessing by comparison. That is well known, of course. But the fears of Rosamond were for the moment appeased by the words of her grandmother, and she next inquired:

"'Where is my husband and his visitor?'

"'They are in the next room, talking together.'

"As Madam Journey spoke, hurried steps were heard approaching, the door was thrown open, and Raphael Brooke rushed into the room, looking more like a maniac than ever I saw a sane man look in my life; his eyes were wild, his gestures distracted, his words frenzied.

"'Rosamond!' he cried, 'I have wronged you more bitterly than man ever wronged woman before. The only reparation I can make you is to die!' With that

he put his hand in his breast pocket and drew forth a pistol.

"Rosamond shrieked and sprang forward; but before she could endanger her own life by seizing the pistol, the sheriff, who had come up quietly behind, laid his hand on the arm of the madman and dispossessed him of the weapon, saying, calmly, as he did so:

"'Brooke, compose yourself. There is no need for all this violence. Remember that I, who have known you from your childhood, believe in none of these charges. If I had, I should have let those rude men come alone on their errand. As it was, I chose to come myself, to soften as much as I could the shock for you. Do not let my coming be in vain. Now calm yourself. The charges, it is true, are very grave, and the testimony that supports them may be very strong; but the truth and the right are stronger than all.'

"While the sheriff spoke, his prisoner (for a prisoner we now saw that he was) remained with his arms folded and his head bowed in an attitude and expression of the deepest dejection. Now he answered in the hollow voice of despair:

"'Yes, yes; the truth and the right are strong; yet, as short as my own life has been, I have seen them overthrown by falsehood and wrong!'

"'Temporarily! temporarily!' said the sheriff, looking around toward Mrs. Brooke and Madam Journey, who both stood with tightly-clasped hands and fixed eyes, gazing breathlessly upon the two gentlemen.

"Perceiving, then, for the first time, that visitors and others were crowding up with faces full of curiosity, Mr. Wardloe turned again to the mistress of the house, and said:

"'Madam, will you kindly excuse us to these ladies and gentlemen, and request them to withdraw for a few moments?'

"And then, in a lower tone, he added:

"'It is absolutely necessary that the room should be cleared before I can make any explanation.'

"The company and the servants withdrew. I was about to follow them, when Madam Journey laid her hand upon my arm, and, addressing the sheriff, said:

"'Mr. Wardloe, we have no better friend in the world than this gentleman, Mr. Basil Wall. I desire that he shall remain, to give us the adantage of advice and assistance. I begin to think that we may need both.'

"'Let it be as you will, madam,' answered the sheriff.

"So I stayed; and we all sat down. The two ladies, indeed, were so faint from agitation, that they were not capable of standing longer.

"The sheriff took out a folded document from his pocket, unfolded it, and placed it, open, in the hands of Madam Journey. She began to read it, and, as she progressed, her face gradually assumed an expression of blank horror.

"It was, in fact—as I afterward discovered, but did not know then—a warrant issued under the hand of a South Carolinian magistrate, for the arrest, upon the charge of forgery and theft, of one Raphael Brooke, a quadroon, the reputed son of Raphael Brooke, deceased, and late of that place.

"Madam Journey is a strong woman, as you may have discovered before this. She folded the paper slowly, as if to gain time; turned her pale face away from the anxious scrutiny of Rosamond, and, addressing the sheriff, said:

"'I do not understand this, sir, in the least. Some great misapprehension must be here. If it is really necessary that Mr. Brooke should go with you to set this matter right, I do suppose that he must go, and go immemediately. But I cannot see the good of troubling my granddaughter with the details.'

"And with this, Madam Journey looked fixedly, first at the sheriff, and then at the prisoner, to warn them to keep as much of the affair as they could from the knowledge of Rosamond as long as possible. But how her own heart must have groaned under the burden of that secret all the while!

"The sheriff and the prisoner both understood and agreed with her.

"'I think with you, madam, that there is some great misapprehension, if there is not, indeed, something deeper, in the shape of an artfully arranged conspiracy. I think, also, that it is necessary for Mr. Brooke to go

at once with me back to his native State, to try to set the matter right,' said Mr. Wardloe; at the close of his speech, looking meaningly upon the agonized face of Raphael Brooke, as if entreating him to be silent and reticent, for the sake of his terrified wife.

"She was looking from one to the other, in the extremity of distress.

"'You are keeping something from me! I am sure you are! But I will not be put off so! If it concerns my dear husband, I must, and will know what it is!' she exclaimed.

"Raphael Brooke had by this time recovered somewhat from the shock of his sudden arrest upon such shameful charges. He was also calmed in some measure by the soothing words of the sheriff. With a meaning glance at that officer, he turned toward his wife, and said:

"'My dearest, this is a matter involving my right and title to my whole real estate in South Carolina. If the case should be decided against me, I am ruined!'—thus telling her the truth so far as his words went, yet not telling her anything like the whole truth. This naturally deceived her.

"'And is that all?' she demanded, with an inexperienced girl's supreme disregard of fortune. 'Is that all, that you should go mad and talk desperately about it?'

"'Yes, that is all,' answered the sheriff, telling an out-and-out white lie, for which I hope he will be forgiven.

"'Well, I do not think that anything to make such a terrible fuss over,' she added, with some surprise, and almost, I might say, with some incredulity, which the sheriff perceived with uneasiness, for he quickly rejoined:

"'Yes, but, my dear young lady, we men are not so very indifferent to our posssessions as you appear to be. And if Mr. Brooke loses his case, he loses all his fortune; he is, as he himself says, ruined.'

"'I don't see that at all. Ruined? How can he be ruined? If he should lose everything he possesses in South Carolina, what of that? I have a large fortune, which is now as much his as mine.'

"'But perhaps he may be fond of the old place,' suggested the sheriff, feeling it necessary to say something.

"'Then we will buy it back. And if I haven't money

enough for the purpose, mamma and grandmamma will give me some of theirs,' said Rosamond, magnificently.

"'Very true; but still it will be well to gain our cause and save the old estate, if possible. To do so, Mr. Brooke will have to proceed immediately to his native State. And, indeed, fair lady, we have no time to lose. We wish to catch the steamboat that passes Henniker, *en route* for Norfolk, about four o'clock this afternoon. It is now one.'

"'Is there such necessity for haste? There is a boat that leaves for Norfolk every week. Could you not delay a week? We were going to South Carolina ourselves in about two weeks from this time? Could we not at least wait for the next boat?'

"'Upon no account, my dear young lady. Mr. Brooke will tell you so himself,' said the sheriff.

"'No, my dearest Rosamond, we cannot wait,' added her husband.

"'Well, it is a short notice to prepare for a long journey. But I can make my maid pack up what is really needed in an hour, and gradmamma can send the rest of our effects after us.'

"'After "us," my dear Rosamond. Surely, you do not think of accompanying me?' inquired Raphael Brooke, in surprise.

"'Oh, yes, I do. I don't believe in separating man and wife under any circumstances,' smiled the young lady, who had now quite recovered her spirits. 'I am of Desdemona's mind, "I love my lord to live with him,"' she added.

"'But, my dear Mrs. Brooke, this is impossible. Our journey is a forced one. Our traveling companions rude men. You really would be seriously inconvenienced by going with us now. You can come after us in a week or so, if you think proper. Mr. Brooke will, I feel sure, agree with me in this view of the case,' said the sheriff, in much embarrassment.

"'Yes, my dear Rosamond, Mr. Wardloe speaks truly. It is not only inconvenient, but impossible for you to accompany us now. If necessary, you shall come after us; otherwise, I may return soon to fetch you.'

"Mrs. Brooke looked from one speaker to the other in

much dissatisfaction; when Madam Journey struck in and said:

"'Rosamond, my dear, has your old home grown so distasteful to you or your old friends so disagreeable that you cannot remain here with us a few days, but must go off with your husband in this sudden manner, even to his annoyance?'

"Rosamond drooped her head. She was always of the same pliable temper that you see her now. She yielded the point and cheerfully consented to remain at Henniker.

"Mr. Brooke made the necessary preparations for his sudden journey. For this purpose he went up to his chamber, followed by his wife, and watched by one of the sheriff's officers, who was quietly placed on guard at the head of the stairs.

"Madam Journey and the sheriff and myself were left together in the drawing-room. It was then that Madam Journey, pale as death, told me the purport of the paper she had read. I was so stricken with horror and amazement that I half suspected I was suffering from nightmare and would presently awake.

"'Now, in the name of all that is merciful, who shall break this to my most unfortunate child?' demanded the old lady.

"'Do not tell her at all, madam, until it is absolutely necessary for you to do so. Pursue the same course that your instinct first pointed out. Use a wise reticence and keep all newspapers out of her way,' said Mr. Wardloe.

"'But she will insist upon going after him.'

"'Put her off with some excuse or other, and gain as much time as you can. I hope, I do hope, that there will be no necessity for her coming. I hope that the charges against him will be dismissed on further investigation. The whole thing appears to be a well-managed conspiracy. If it can be shown as such, then will Mr. Brooke be discharged from custody and permitted to return at once. If, however, the worst should ensue, and he should be committed for trial, and that trial should end in conviction, then, and then only, will it be necessary to break the matter to his young wife.'

"'But—the whole charge—the whole matter is so ex-

traordinary! so inexplicable! My anguish of spirit for Rosamond's sake so benumbed all my faculties that I did not even think about the details of this affair till now; but now—tell me! what are the circumstances? upon what evidence is all this dreadful charge founded?'

"'Madam, I know so little beyond what is contained in the warrant I showed you that I cannot undertake an explanation at this moment. And, besides, here comes my traveling companion,' said Mr. Wardloe, evasively, as Raphael Brooke re-entered the room.

"Being soothed and encouraged by his old friend, the sheriff, Raphael Brooke took leave of his young wife and her friends and went away with more calmness than could have been expected under such calamitous circumstances.

"After the departure of the sheriff and his prisoner, Madam Journey put upon me the task of explaining to the company (as well as I could without revealing the facts) what had just occurred.

"I told them that a sudden exigency, arising out of affairs that involved Mr. Brooke's right and title to his South Carolinian estate, had called that gentleman back to his native State. This, you perceive, was the truth, as far as it went; but not the whole truth, which certainly, under the circumstances, I did not feel called upon to reveal.

"Yet, somehow or other, the impression spread that calamity had either already fallen upon the family of Henniker, or was immediately impending over it. And the guests gradually made their excuses for shortening their visit, and one by one took their leave.

"I should have gone with the others, but that, at Madam Journey's earnest request, I remained. Then that lady sent for Father Waldemar to come to her immediately. And the good man obeyed the summons and presented himself at Henniker House the same evening. She had an inteview with the priest in her own room, at which besides themselves I only was present.

"She informed him that the young man he had introduced and vouched for had just been arrested and taken away on a charge of felony, and that the warrant had designated him, Raphael Brooke, a quadroon, and the re-

puted son of Raphael Brooke, deceased. Having told him this, the old lady looked fixedly at the priest to note the effect it should have upon him.

"Father Waldemar was greatly astonished—struck dumb, as it were, and for a minute or more had not a word to say. When he did speak it was with great emphasis. Striking his hand upon the table, he exclaimed:

"'This is misapprehension or conspiracy! I know that his father, Raphael Brooke, married Euphrasie Darusmont.'"

At the sound of this name Vandeleur started; but recovered himself.

"'I was present at the wedding. I was scarcely grown then and was assisting at the high mass at which the ceremony was performed. I know that Raphael Brooke, the younger, is the only son of this marriage. I became his tutor in his childhood.'

"'Then you think these charges without foundation in truth?' said Madam Journey.

"'Without the slightest, madam,' answered Father Waldemar.

"'Then how could they have arisen? Who could have set them on foot?'

"'Stop, stop, let us reflect who would be benefited by the setting aside of this young man's claim to his father's estate. I have it! Judah Brakeman, a nephew of the late Raphael Brooke, the only son of his only sister. He would be the next heir, failing our Raphael.'

"'But could any man be so infernal? And, if so, upon what could he found such a preposterous and cruel charge?' asked Madam Journey.

"'It is wrong to judge, but we are searching for the truth. I have known him also from his childhood up. He also was my pupil, sharing the studies of his cousin, under the roof and under the protection of his uncle. But he was of an envious, ungrateful, grasping nature—a thoroughly evil nature. And I suspect now the circumstance upon which he has founded his charge.'

"'What? What?'

"'The very dark complexion of Euphrasie Darusmont, and the fact that her father and herself were both strangers in Charleston, and no one but Raphael Brooke,

the elder, knew anything about them. I need not enter into details, but, you see, what a pretense he might have set up on that ground.'

"'Yes, yes, to be sure.'

"'Of course, I do not know that this is the true explanation of the affair. But it is the only one that occurs to me. Let me ask here, where are Rosamond and her mother? How do they bear this shock?'

"'The better that they do not know the worst. We have decided to keep it from them for the present. They think that Mr. Brooke has been suddenly called home by some question arising there as to the validity of his right to his father's estate.'

"'That was prudent. It is always well to save unnecessary pain, when a little wise reserve will do it. As for myself, I shall make arrangements to go at once to South Carolina, to the assistance of my young friend. I shall try to start by the next boat. Keep up a good trust in Heaven, madam, and all will be well in the end,' said the priest, rising to bid us good-by.

"The next day I left Henniker House. Several days of the most intense anxiety and suspense passed slowly enough away. And then a letter came from Charleston. But it was not from Raphael Brooke, or to any of the ladies of Henniker. It was from Sheriff Wardloe, and to me. It contained news that I was to break gently to my fair friends at Henniker. There had been an examination before a magistrate. The testimony against the accused was very strong. He had been committed for trial; but was afterward released on bail. He was then at the the sheriff's own house. But the intense mental excitement he suffered had culminated in a brain fever, of which he was now lying dangerously ill.

"I went immediately to Henniker, taking care to leave the letter behind, lest the ladies should ask to see it.

"I sent for Madam Journey to the drawing-room, and I told her the truth. She was greatly shocked, but agreed with me still to keep the worst of the news from Rosamond. She then went to her granddaughter, and told her that I had got a letter from Mr. Wardloe; that Raphael was his guest; that the law business was in an unfinished state, and that, under those circumstances, it

might be well for her to go on and join her husband. The old lady judged it best not to inform the young wife of her husband's extreme illness and danger until after the long journey, with its fatigues and anxieties, should be over.

"Fortunately for them, Father Waldemar had not started on his mission—could not have done so, in fact, since he was waiting for the boat that would pass the next day. Madam Journey sent for him that afternoon, and had a long, confidential interview with him.

"They then made hasty preparation to leave home; and Madam Journey, Mrs. Brooke and Father Waldemar left the next day, by the steamer, for Norfolk, *en route* for Charleston.

"Now, Mr. Vandeleur, I was not eye and ear witness to what happened after they reached South Carolina. I can only speak of those events from hearsay—and not very fully from that, since every one naturally shrank from conversing on the subject. However, thus much I can tell:

"When they reached Charleston, the whole party took rooms at a hotel, and Father Waldemar went at once to the sheriff's house, to inquire about Raphael Brooke. He found him quite unconscious, lying, in fact, in a state of coma, that usually, in such cases, ends in death. With this report he returned to Madam Journey, accompanied by the sheriff, who came to tender the hospitalities of his bachelor's establishment to the young wife of his dying charge and to her protectress.

"The two ladies thankfully accepted this offer, and took leave of Father Waldemar, who, on his part, went to stay with a brother priest.

"On their way to Mr. Wardloe's residence, Mrs. Brooke, whose anxious questions were quite embarrassing, was told that her husband was ill in bed, but not how ill, or that he was in any danger. It was thought better that the painful fact should dawn upon her own observation gradually, as it must while she should watch her husband.

"She was introduced into his darkened chamber, and, when she saw his unconscious form, she was told that he was asleep. And so slight was her experience in illness,

that she supposed that this was only sleep. And she sat down by his bedside to wait patiently for his wakening. How long she had to wait you may imagine—through that day and night, and through the next day and night, and far into the third morning. In this time, the truth slowly, gently passed into her mind—first, that this sleep was long—prolonged—unnatural—dangerous—that it might terminate in death.

"It was on the morning of the third day of watching that this last fatal idea entered her head, and she jumped up from her seat by his bedside and ran into the next room, where Madam Journey sat, and threw herself upon the old lady's bosom and sobbed aloud.

"Madam Journey soothed her as well as she could, though she might give but little hope. And it is likely that Rosamond's flood of tears relieved her overcharged heart more than all her grandmother's words could do.

"At any rate, she returned to her post at her husband's bedside, and sat quietly there for a few hours longer. Her eyes often rested on his pale, still, deathlike face. At last, while she was gazing fondly on it, his eyes slowly opened and fixed themselves upon her. A rush of joy filled her heart. She thought that a crisis had passed, and that he was going to get well. At first she could not speak for joy. But she stooped and kissed him.

"'You here, my love' he whispered, in a voice so faint and low that she had to put her ear to his lips to hear the question repeated. She kissed him again many times before she answered:

"'Where should I be but here with you?'

"He tried to raise his hands to caress her; but, oh! how deadly weak they were. She saw this, and she laid her head softly on the pillow beside him, and drew his hand to her cheek and lips, and caressed him, and told him, in low, cooing tones, how much she loved him; how happy she was to see him so much better; and how soon she hoped he would be well.

"Madam Journey, who entered the room at that moment, says that she herself stood rooted to the spot with the pain she felt in witnessing poor Rosamond's perfect confidence in her husband's speedy recovery. However, a change had come, and Madam Journey recollected that

the attendant physician had left orders to be informed of this change when it should take place, and so she left the room as quietly as she had entered it, and went to send a messenger after Dr. Carrol.

"How vain that summons, you will soon see. The man was dying—dying fast. He himself knew it. Raising his eyes to his young wife's face, he murmured:

" 'My darling, I am going to leave you, and I am glad to go. How well—how well it is for you that I should go you will know soon—very soon. God bless you, dear—dear wife.'

"These words were uttered with great difficulty, and they were his last. Their meaning had scarcely time to pass from Rosamond's senses to her unprepared intelligence. She herself had scarcely time to fix her startled eyes upon her husband's face before that face became still in death.

"Rosamond's nature was all undisciplined. She had no self-control in any emergency. She caught the beautiful dead head up upon her bosom, and screamed until her shrieks filled the house.

"Madam Journey, who had already returned, and was standing quietly by her side, now took her by the hand and firmly led her from the room. It would be useless and painful to dwell upon the grief of this young widow. A long illness, with many days of unconsciousness, mercifully intervened to arrest the first wild agony of her sorrow. In the meantime, Raphael Brooke's remains were interred with unusual funeral pomp and ceremony. Madam Journey, the most simple and unassuming woman in the world, so far as her own tastes and habits go, insisted upon this manner of doing the utmost honors to the deceased, for the very reason that so foul and unmerited dishonor had been so recently and fatally cast upon him. I think, under the circumstances, she was right.

"At all events, Father Waldemar agreed with her, for he wrote the obituary notice of the departed, and, ignoring entirely the false charges that had been made against him, spoke of him as the son of the late Colonel Raphael Brooke, and spoke of his personal merits and accom-

plishments, high and rare moral and intellectual endowments, as they deserved.

"And one of the first things the young widow was taken to see when, at the end of two months, she rode out for the first time, was the handsome marble monument that marked her husband's grave, and was inscribed with his name, age, and parentage, and also with a high tribute to his many excellencies.

"This done, Rosamond was still kept in ignorance of any slur that had been cast upon the name of her late husband, or any suit pending that endangered her own dower as his widow.

"Judah Brakeman, as Father Waldemar surmised, had been the prosecutor in the criminal charge, and was now the plaintiff in the civil suit; the criminal trial had been forestalled by death; but the civil suit was still pending, though somewhat changed in its relative parties since the widow of Raphael Brooke was now the defendant. Very little this young defendant knew about the cause she was defending. She had been told that it was a claim set up by Judah Brakeman to her husband's estate; but she had no idea of the foundation upon which this claim was laid, and certainly not the slightest suspicion that the legitimacy of Raphael Brooke's birth, the validity of his father's marriage, and even the social status of his mother, as a free white woman, was called in question; yet such was the case.

"The friends of Rosamond Brooke still kept from her knowledge all the darkest features of the investigation. She appeared in court only by her attorney. She signed all papers that were presented to her without reading them; did all she was ever directed to do, without disputing the point at issue; and asked no questions—or very few; and if among them there happened to be one which it would have pained her to have had answered truly, her loving friends would so artfully bewilder and confound her understanding with Latin and law terms, that the more they explained the case, the more it seemed to require explanation, so that, at length, the inquirer gave over in a state of mental confusion approximating to semi-insanity.

"It would be too wearisome to carry you through the

long lawsuit, and describe the intricate plot and the artful conspiracy, or tell of the suborned witnesses, the forged papers, the bribery and corruption, the chicanery and perjury with which it was arranged and carried on. It is enough to say that the suit was finally decided in favor of the heirs of Raphael Brooke. And in this decision there was not a loop for retreat from it left, not a peg upon which the plaintiff could hang a plea for an appeal to a higher court. The victory of the defendant was overwhelming, complete, final. The social status of Raphael Brooke and his heirs was fixed upon an immovable foundation. And, moreover, Judah Brakeman, in a well-grounded fear of a criminal prosecution for conspiracy and fraud, fled the country.

"The suit had occupied several months, and Madam Journey, Mrs. Brooke and Father Waldemar had remained in Charleston during its whole progress to its triumphant termination. Then all three of the friends set out to return to their Maryland home. Some rumor of their trouble had preceded them; but the means of communication were not near so convenient then as now, nor the exchange of newspapers and news so frequent and general. Few knew anything about the lawsuit, and none knew the rights of it. However, on the word of Father Waldemar, they were assured that the trial had terminated in favor of the Brookes.

"It was in April our friends reached Henniker. In June, our Berenice came to console and bless her young mother. She has consoled and blessed her. Mrs. Brooke looks happy—does she not?"

"Yes," answered Vandeleur, "strangely happy for a woman who has suffered such an awful bereavement."

"There is a cause for that—the utter ignorance in which she was mercifully kept of all the darker features in her sorrow. She thinks her husband died of the illness that might have taken any other person off. She has no suspicion of the terrible truth that he died of brain-fever, brought on by the shame and agony of the most mortifying and debasing charge that could have been made against a man. And, moreover, the first recovery of her spirits, after her great bereavement, dates from a certain dream she had during her convalescence from her

confinement, and which made a great and lasting impression upon her mind. She dreamed that her husband appeared to her, arrayed in angelic robes, and crowned with a golden circlet, and wearing, in his attitude and countenance, an expression of great sweetness and majesty, and yet, withal, of sadness, too. She thought that he told her it was only her tears that troubled him; and that he would show her where he lived, and how happy he was, so that she should grieve no more; that so saying, he took her by the hand, and they arose rapidly in space, and found themselves in a beautiful region, whereof, in the glowing language of the Holy Bible, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the imagination of man to conceive, the glory.' This paradise was peopled by the spirits of the just, made perfect—angelic forms of men and women, and little children, wandering amid verdant groves and blooming flowers and sparkling fountains. Rosamond awoke from this dream, and found herself still on earth, and lying in her own bed, with her young infant sleeping beside her. But from that day she began to recover her spirits. She did not hesitate to tell this singular dream to any one who was sufficiently interested in it to listen to her. And to this hour she declares that the dream was the most delightful experience she ever had in her life; that she would not part with its memory for any earthly good; that her faith has been stronger, her hope brighter, and her life happier because of that heavenly vision. Mr. Vandeleur, my story is ended."

"And you have told me all?" inquired Vane.

"All," answered the old man.

"The very worst?"

"The very worst."

"Then, all I have to say is this—that, horrible as it is, inexplicable as it is, I see nothing in it that should prevent my marrying Miss Brooke to-morrow, if she would honor me with her hand," said the young man, firmly.

"Ah, Vandeleur! but she does! I fear it would be very hard to persuade Berenice Brooke that she would not seal your fate, and doom you to death, by giving you her hand! She may not believe in the malediction any more than you do, but she sees the precedent! She may

not consider the family fate, as the curse carried out, but as a chain of coincidences; but still, she is awed and terrified by the mystery, and the fear that you will follow the fatal precedent, and form another link in the strange chain of coincidences. Berenice Brooke trembles without believing."

"At all events, I shall see her again on my return from the South, and do what I can to disabuse her of this superstition. And now I have kept you up very late, my friend!" said Vandeleur.

"No, it is only eleven o'clock, only an hour beyond my usual bedtime. And, really, the evening has passed quickly. But now the tale is told, the jug is empty, and the fire is low; so we will see about retiring," said the old man, consulting his big silver watch, and then rapping loudly upon the partition wall at his back.

Fulvia answered the well-known summons.

"Are you tired of waiting, my dear?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Tired?" echoed Fulvia, raising her eyebrows, "why, we have been cracking walnuts, and eating apples and listening to Pike Turner telling us about his hunts and his fights. We shouldn't be tired all night."

"For all that, we will have prayers, and go to bed, my dear. So hand me down the Bible, and then call the others in."

Fulvia cleared the little table of its plates and glasses, placed upon it a Bible and a lamp, and then went out and called her sister and their guest.

When they were all gathered together, the old man read a chapter from the Bible and then led his family in prayer. After which the sisters sang a hymn, in which the hunter joined with a fine, deep, bass voice. Then the patriarch pronounced a benediction. And all bade each other good-night, and went to rest—Vane Vandeleur escorted to his room by Pike Turner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NIGHT.

Oh, I have passed a miserable night,
So full of fearful dreams, of ugly sights,
That as I am a Christian, faithful man,
I would not spend another such a night,
Though 'twere to buy a world of happy days.
—SHAKESPEARE.

The room into which Pike Turner showed Vane Vandeleur, exhibited the same features of frugal poverty that had characterized the old parlor below. There was a homemade carpet on the floor, paper blinds at the windows, a patch-work quilt on the bed, a coarse linen cloth on the top of the plain pine dressing-table, which was adorned by a small looking-glass hung upon a nail; there was a pine washstand, with an earthenware basin and ewer, and with crash towels; and there were country-made chip-bottom chairs. But everything was beautifully clean, and brightened, besides, by the inevitable wood fire, and decorated by little bunches of holly, with their brilliant dark green leaves and glowing scarlet berries, in two old gallipots, on the mantelshelf. Everywhere the care and taste of the sisters were visible.

"I have slept worse, my friend, many a time, than you'll sleep here to-night," said the hunter, gazing with an air of approbation around the comfortable chamber.

"And so have I, and shall again. I like these homely, country houses," heartily agreed Vane.

"I wouldn't depreciate any house; I like all the houses; but I had rather stop in this one when I come to these parts, than any other. I know I would," said Pike, emphatically.

"What! rather than at Stormy Point?" smiled Vane, as visions of Pike's agreeable old flame, Miss Pinky Skinner, flitted before his mind's eye.

"Oh, yes, a deal rather. I am always at home here; everybody makes me welcome. I can't do amiss here, do what I will. So I never feel as if I was in anybody's

way, or put anybody out, you know. The old man treats me like a son, and makes me free of the premises. The young girls let me smoke my pipe anywhere I like, if it is in their own room. This makes a lonely man like me feel happy and at home, you know. God bless them all for their kindness to me," said the hunter, fervently, and raising his hand to his bare head, as if he would have reverently raised the fur cap, which, however, was not there.

"They are all very fond of you, Mr. Turner, that is evident to everybody. Their hospitality is no effort to them, Mr. Turner."

"Yes."

"I wonder——," began Vane, and then he paused and hesitated.

"Well, you wonder what?" inquired Pike.

"An impertinent question; why you never married."

The big hunter heaved a sigh like a sough of wind through the forest trees, but made no answer. This encouraged Vane to proceed.

"You are now a fine-looking man, in the prime of life. But you won't be always in your prime, you know. You are not going to remain as you are, nor retrograde to youth again. But now you have the metal in you to make a thriving pioneer farmer, and to raise a fine, healthy family, if only you would marry, and settle down."

"Oh, yes, I am strong and hearty enough as to that; and I have money enough to take and stock a farm, and build and furnish a house," sighed the hunter, as if they were rather misfortunes than anything else.

"Then, Mr. Turner, why are you, what you so pathetically called yourself just now—'a lonely man?'"

"Because I am lonely, very lonely; and I feel it all the more when I go away from a good family circle like this," sighed the hunter.

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Vane ventured the remark:

"Mr. Turner, the family here are very fond of you."

"Yes, Heaven bless their hearts, they are," confessed Pike. "So they are."

"Especially the sisters."

"Lord love them, yes. They treat me like an elder brother."

"And most especially the fair-haired Flavia."

"God bless her sweet blue eyes, yes! I do believe she loves the old hunter."

"And I'm sure the old hunter loves her."

"He'd die for her!" burst forth Pike.

"Hadn't he better live for her?" laughed Vane.

"Eh?" exclaimed Pike, in amazement.

"Hadn't you better live for her and work for her? Hadn't you better marry her, in short?"

Pike Turner got up and stood with his back to the fire and stretched out both his arms in his astonishment.

"Why, I never once thought of such a thing before in all my life! The idea never even once came near my head!" he so emphatically exclaimed that there was no possibility of distrusting his words.

"You had better begin to think of it now, then, my friend," laughed Vane.

"Why, I never any more thought of any young lady in the way of a wedding than if I was myself a married man," pursued the hunter, unable to recover from his amazement.

"But you are not a married man and you never have been."

"No, surely not. But I never even imagined such a thing as marrying anybody but my old sweetheart, Pinky Skinner, than if I'd already been her husband!" continued Pike.

"You are not engaged to her?"

"No, but I made her offers years ago, which she didn't see fit to accept just then. So I gave her time."

"Did she give you hope?"

"Not a bit of it. She assured me that she would just as soon marry a gorilla as me. I told her I would give her time to change her mind. And so I have given her time. I have come back every year to renew my offers, and I came this year to do the same, and I have done it."

"And has she changed her mind yet?"

"No."

"Do you feel very much cut up about it?"

"No, I don't. You see, I've got used to rebuffs."

"Do you think she will ever change her mind?"

"No, I don't hardly! but I must give her time."

"How much time?"

"I don't know."

"You are both growing old."

"I know it; but she is my old sweetheart, and a man ought to be faithful and patient with a woman."

"Loyal heart!" exclaimed Vane, in a burst of admiration. "But, as is the case with many another loyal heart, its loyalty is an hallucination and its object a humbug."

"Pinky is not a humbug. She never deceived me; she never pretended to like me; she always told me I was a bear and a gorilla, and she would never have me on any terms; but, you see, I hoped she would change her mind," said the hunter, reflectively.

"Mr. Turner——"

"Now, sir, would it inconvenience you to leave off calling me Mr. Turner and just call me Pike?" inquired the backwoodsman.

"Not in the slightest degree," smilingly answered Vandeleur.

"Because, you see, sir, I hardly know who you are talking to when you call me Mr. So and So. I beg your pardon—what was you about to say, sir?"

"Pike! Pinky Skinner will never change her mind."

"Don't you think so, sir?"

"Never, Pike! Miss Pinky's mind, such as it is, is given up to admiration of her old employer."

"The captain, sir?"

"Of course."

"Why, he's old enough to be her own father!"

"Yes, but for all that, she is fond of him, and jealous of all other single women for his sake. That, I take it, is the explanation of her conduct, and her bad temper also. She'd rather be a hired servant in his house than an honored wife in any other man's."

"But—she's always quarreling with him!" exclaimed Pike, incredulously.

"That's her peculiar way of showing her regard. And observe: She never quarrels with him, except about the widows of Widowville, of all of whom, from the old lady down, she is intensely jealous; or if she ever does differ

with him upon any other subject, it is about his going away from home oftener and staying away longer than she likes. So, you see, her irritability is but the expression of her attachment and her distrust."

"Well," exclaimed the hunter, sitting down and slapping his knee, "I'm blest if here ain't an eye-opening! Pinky Skinner in love with the old captain! And has been, I dare say, all the time."

"Very likely. It must have begun when both were younger than they are now. Say, when she was fifteen and he was forty-five. I have heard of strange feats of Cupid in my short life."

"Pinky Skinner in love with the old captain!" exclaimed the hunter, unable to get over his astonishment. "Well, I am blest!"

"Yes, I think you are, in this affair, for it enables you to release yourself of all responsibility connected with Miss Skinner's future."

"Pinky Skinner in—good gracious! Bless my soul! Dear me! Does the old captain know it, do you think?"

"No—his blindness is the funniest part of the whole affair."

"Pinky Skin— Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Oh, dear! Does the old captain return her affections, do you suppose?"

"I don't know; but I think he would be quite wretched if he hadn't Miss Pinky there to quarrel with him."

"Well, here is an eye-opening!" again exclaimed the hunter, slapping his knee.

"Mr. Turner——"

"Pike, if it would not incommode you, sir."

"Pike, then. My frank friend, I have put a good many questions to you to-night. Now, as a general thing, it is considered ill-bred and impertinent for anybody but a lawyer or a doctor to ask questions——"

"Not at all, sir. Not the least," hastily exclaimed Pike.

"And even then they must be professional questions," went on Vane, as if he had not been interrupted.

"Not at all, sir. Now I do assure you," repeated Pike, more politely than coherently.

"But circumstances alter cases——"

"No, indeed, sir. I beg you to believe me——"

"And my really sincere esteem and regard for you——"

"Oh, not at all, sir. I beg and entreat you won't——"

"Made me a sort of Paul Pry."

"Now look here, Mr. Vandeleur, I implore you not to apologize. Don't I know it was your own good nature moved you to open my eyes. And if you haven't opened 'em, I'm blowed!"

"I hope, Pike, you will have no remaining regrets on the score of Miss Pinky Skinner," replied Vane, with some feeling.

"Why, no, sir. You see I thought myself in duty bound to come back here and make offers to her every year, seeing I had promised so to do. But it has come to this with me now: that I no longer crave to have her all to myself as much as I crave to see her well provided for and happy. If she is contented in her present dependent state, why, I am. But I own I should be better satisfied if she was married to the old captain, as I suppose she would be also. Pinky Skinner in love with——! Oh, my goodness!"

"I am heartily rejoiced to see you take the matter so cheerfully. And now I hope you will think of what I suggested to you about these lovely sisters."

"And there's another eye-opening! I shan't be able to sleep a wink to-night, I know. Or if I do, I shall dream of a fine farm, and of cows and calves, and hens and chicks, and blue-eyed Flavia, with a blue-eyed baby in her arms!"

"I hope you may, and that your dream may come true."

"Well, sir, whether I sleep or not, myself, I mustn't keep you from your sleep. So good-night, sir, and pleasant dreams to yourself," said the hunter, as he took up his own saddle and left the room.

When the pleasant face of the pioneer was gone, a shadow fell upon the countenance of Vane Vandeleur. The memory of the horrible story he had heard darkened his spirit. He went to bed but could not go to sleep. Or, if by good luck, he fell into a light slumber, his imagination was busy with visions of the past.

In dreams he was whirled through the dazzling splendors of the "Merry Monarch's" brilliant court, among its

gay and gallant courtiers, and its beautiful, baleful court ladies.

In dreams he wandered through the primeval forest of provincial Maryland, and sat in the wigwams of her red sons, and listened to the songs of her dusky daughters, or chased the fox or tracked the deer.

In dreams he sat at the sumptuous feast, where the treacherous beauty destroyed her lover in attempting to poison her rival. He saw the Indian widow's inspired form as she rasied her eyes and hand to Heaven, and called down its just vengeance upon the murderess and her daughters forever.

He saw her again, as she stood upon the scaffold, guarded by the soldiery, and surrounded by the hooting mob, yet beautiful and majestic in the dignity and patience of her sorrow; as she yielded up her nursing infant to the care of the compassionate keeper, and received into her brave bosom that swift, sure shaft from her father's bow that saved his daughter from the degradation of the rope. He saw her dying look of joy.

In dreams he saw and sympathized with the abduction of the beautiful novice by her spirited lover, and he shouted to the maiden to hold fast, and to the youth to ride for their lives, and not spare whip or spur—So shouting, he awoke.

Day was just dawning, as he could see through the blue-shaded window. The house was very still, no one seemed to be awake or stirring. It was too early to rise and dress; so Vane just stepped out of bed, took up several heavy logs from the pile of wood at the chimney-corner, and laid them on the smouldering fire. Then, leaving them to burn slowly, he got into bed again, and being very much exhausted in mind and body, he soon fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Fortunately for the fatigued guest, there was no such iron rule about early rising here as prevailed at Widowville, and somewhat detracted from its otherwise generous hospitality; nor yet was there any boisterous, old sporting captain to rouse one up early in the morning with an alarum about ducks and guns; so Vane Vandeleur was allowed to sleep undisturbed far into the forenoon. When he awoke again, it was broad day. The snowstorm was

evidently over, for the morning sun was shining through the blue paper shades of his windows, filling the room with a soft azure light. The logs that he had laid upon the smouldering fire were in a bright blaze.

He felt refreshed by his long sleep and cheered by the pleasant aspect of his chamber. But he feared that he had kept the family waiting for their breakfast; so he got up at once, dressed quickly, and went downstairs.

He found the table set for breakfast in the parlor and the sisters seated at needlework by the fire. No one else was in the room.

"Good-morning, young ladies! I fear that I have kept you waiting breakfast," said Vane, as he entered the room.

"Oh, no; not at all," replied Fulvia, as she arose, with a smile, to give him her hand in greeting.

"Our uncle has not come down yet; though, as we hear him stirring in his room, we may expect him soon," added Flavia, as she also arose and pushed back her chair to make room for the guest at the fire.

"And Mr. Turner?" inquired Vane, as he took the offered seat.

"Oh, Pike! bless his old soul, he took his gun and went after ducks. He keeps us in game while he is here. And he has just returned with a half-a-dozen brace, and has gone to wash his hands," answered Fulvia.

"And here comes Uncle Basil now!" said Flavia, starting up to meet her beloved old relative with her usual morning kiss.

The old gentleman came in smiling a benediction upon all.

"A pleasant morning, sir! a very pleasant morning, after the little spurt of a snowstorm we had last night," he said, advancing and holding out his hand to Vane.

"Very, indeed," replied the young man, cordially returning the greeting.

"You 'supped full of horrors' last night, sir; but I hope you didn't suffer from indigestion or have the nightmare after it," said Mr. Wall.

"Thanks! I slept very late in the morning. I had feared that I had kept you waiting breakfast."

"Oh, no; I am often late myself. I have come to the

time of life when rest seems to be one of the best things in the world—a preparation, I suppose, to reconcile us to the last long rest," said the venerable man. "But we will have breakfast now, my dears, if you please," he added, cheerfully, turning to the girls.

Both the sisters arose and left the room, to bring it in.

"We have no servant in the house, sir, but one old negro woman, who is our cook and laundress. And my darlings spare her old limbs as much as they can, by using their own. They do all the housework, besides helping her with the fine ironing and the fancy cooking."

Vane smiled his approval of this.

The sisters soon returned—one bringing a pot of coffee, and the other a pot of chocolate.

"But where is Pike Turner, my dears?" inquired their uncle.

"Up in his room. He will be down by the time we get breakfast on the table," answered Fulvia, as she and her sister hurried out to fetch the toast, and the muffins, the fried ham, the fresh eggs, and the broiled chickens.

By the time they were all ready to take their seats, Pike entered, and gave the gentlemen a hearty good-morning. The sisters he had seen earlier.

As they sat around the table, Vane was pleased and amused to notice the change that had come over the back-woodsman. He was always cleanly in his person and in his dress as any Bramin, but he had been a little careless as to its arrangement. Now his costume was precise. Besides this, he stole furtive glances at the fair-haired Flavia, and blushed up to the roots of his hair when detected in them; to say nothing of his trying to carve his wing of the chicken with a teaspoon, or his putting a knife into his coffee, or in many another manner conducting himself like a quiet madman. These eccentricities are perhaps too common to boys in love, especially to old boys in love, to be worthy of notice here, only that they were a little remarkable as affecting the stout hunter. When breakfast was over, Vane Vandeleur arose, and with many expressions of gratitude and regard for the kindness and hospitality of his host, prepared to take his leave.

"If you are going directly back to Stormy Point, sir, I

will bear you company, if you have no objection, as I have an errand there also," said the backwoodsman, who, since the preceding night, had evinced a very great predilection for the society of the young gentleman.

"Yes, I am going there and shall be very glad to give you a seat in my sleigh," said Vane, promptly.

"I wasn't thinking of that, sir. I wasn't wishing to intrude on you at all. I was about to offer you a snug place in my wagon and to propose that old Boobydebil should take the sleigh home. I think we had better go in the wagon, sir, as it can be closed to keep this piercing wind out, which we shall otherwise have in our faces. And, if you'll excuse me for saying it, sir, I don't think you have been used to roughing it as much as I have," said Pike, persuasively.

"I have 'roughed it' a great deal, my friend, both by land and sea; but as you prefer the wagon, so be it; we will ride in that, and send the sleigh home by the old negro," smiled Vane.

"Then I'll go out and see about it all, sir," said Pike, leaving the room.

Neither Old Basil Wall nor the two sisters had overheard this conversation, which had been carried on in a low voice at one of the front windows. So when Pike returned to the room equipped for his drive, they were all taken by surprise.

"Why, you are not going to leave us, too, Pike, I hope?" remonstrated the old gentleman.

"Only for the day, sir. I couldn't possibly do it for a longer time, at least not while I stay in this neighborhood. I shall be back again to-night, Mr. Wall."

"That is a good fellow. We shall expect you," said the old gentleman. Then, turning to his younger guest, he added: "And as for you, Mr. Vandeleur, when you come back to the neighborhood, we shall hope to have you with us very often; and we shall always be very glad to see you."

Vane made a suitable reply, and then he and his traveling companion took leave of the family and departed.

As they seated themselves in the fur-lined wagon, they saw the sleigh with Bobadilla in the driver's seat, flying

before them so fast that in a minute it had flown out of sight.

"There," said Pike, with a little, half-smothered laugh, "do you see that? Who could have talked comfortably or comprehendingly while flying over the country on a flash of lightning, like that sleigh? And I wanted to talk to you about—you know what, Mr. Vandeleur, sir!"

"Fair-haired Flavia?" suggested Vane.

The backwoodsman nodded, and said:

"You see, I really don't suppose you mind rough weather any more than I do; but I knew we couldn't talk in the sleigh, and so I wanted to persuade you to come in the wagon."

"Yes, I understand that."

"Mr. Vandeleur, sir, it does seem to me sometimes that the little angel does like the old hunter," murmured the backwoodsman, with a strangely blended air of simplicity, frankness and diffidence.

"I am very sure she does," replied Vandeleur, emphatically.

"But yet it seems impossible she should like me, and very presumptuous in me, even to hope it—very—when I come to think of it."

"But why? I confess I don't see why."

"Oh, sir, she is such a delicate beauty, and I am such a rough old rhinoceros, as Pinky Skinner called me," said the hunter, falling into discouragement.

"But Pike, do you think that 'delicate beauties' care for nothing else in this world but good looks? Do you think they make no account of manliness, courage, generosity, loyalty, magnanimity? all of which qualities you show in every act of your life, old friend."

"Oh, sir, don't you give me praise for all these, which I know I really don't possess, for it sounds like, it sounds like——"

"Flattery. I know it does, my good friend. But there are some men, and you are one of them, of whose qualities one cannot speak justly without seeming to flatter."

"I hope I'm a true man, that is the most I hope for myself, and that is the best any one can say of me, be he ever so much my friend."

"And that includes all the rest, Pike."

"But I'm such a rough fellow, sir. And she's—she's such a delicate, fairy creature," sighed the hunter, verging on despondency.

"Pike, did you ever hear of Othello?"

"Surely, sir, and seen it played, too, in St. Louis."

"Well, that play was written by a perfect master of human nature—one who knew men's hearts, and especially women's hearts, better than they knew their own. And he has shown us Desdemona, the delicate, refined, young patrician maiden falling in love with Othello the Moor—a man not only 'declined into the vale of years,' as he himself says, but a blackamoor, to boot. Now, Pike, you have not 'declined into the vale of years,' nor are you a blackamoor. You are a very handsome man in your way, and you are in the prime of life. You have, besides, won the heart of your Desdemona, as Othello won the heart of his—by truth, courage, generosity, magnanimity, and all great, manly qualities. Take heart of grace and try your fortunes with the young lady," said Vane, encouragingly.

"Oh, sir, when I think what a change the love of that angel would make in my life—how it would brighten and bless it, I feel that it would be too much joy."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

A hundred thousand welcomes. I could weep
And I could laugh! I'm light and heavy! Welcome!
—SHAKESPEARE.

It gives me wonder, great as my delight,
To see you here before me!—SHAKESPEARE.

Thus talking confidentially together, the young gentleman and the simple-hearted hunter rumbled on, side by side, on the front seat of the wagon.

Pike held the reins, but he could scarcely be said to drive, for the road was plain, and the horses took their own pace. The hunter was of a frank and confiding, though modest, nature, and so he liked to pour all his new thoughts and feelings into the ears of the young friend who had, indeed, first drawn them forth, and now encouraged them so much.

It was near noon when they reached Stormy Point. Bobadilla, with the sleigh, had been there an hour before them. The old captain was expecting them, and so was his estimable housekeeper, to judge by the number of plates that were laid upon the dinner-table.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Vandeleur; glad to see you in again. And you, too, Pike, old friend, though how you do hit about the country, Pike, especially to old Mr. Basil Wall's. I begin to suspect there's some attraction there, eh? eh?" exclaimed the captain, quite at random; for he had not the slightest suspicion of the hunter's growing admiration for the fair-haired Flavia.

But Pike betrayed himself by blushing up to his eyes, like any love-lorn schoolboy, which occasioned the old captain to chuckle and crow loudly, and exclaim, to Pike's overwhelming confusion:

"Ah ha! ha! ha! I thought so! Oh, you sly old fox!" and then to clap the hunter heartily on the shoulder and wish him "well through it."

And then he turned to Vandeleur and asked after the

family at old Mr. Basil Wall's, and, having received satisfactory answers, said:

"Well, I'm glad they're all hearty, because I'm going to send Hal over there to visit the sisters. Blest if I can see what's come over Hal. If I didn't know better, I should think the girl was in love. Last night she played whist with me against Dick and Harry; and if you'll believe me, she trumped all my tricks and none of theirs; returned all their leads and none of mine; played her king upon Harry's ace, when she had two other smaller cards of the same suit; revoked three times, and otherwise conducted herself in such an insane and ridiculous manner, that if she had been a little child, instead of a young woman, I should have jumped up and whipped her on the spot. For you know, with a tender humanity and just logic, we whip little children when they annoy us, because they are so little, and it is so easy and safe to do it, as they can make no resistance to us at the time, nor any appeal against us afterward."

"I don't whip children, captain," answered Vane, "nor neither, I'd stake my life upon it, does Pike Turner."

"Why, I'd die; I'd be torn to pieces and eaten up by a pack of prairie wolves, before I'd do such a thing," emphatically struck in the hunter.

"And I'm equally sure the captain would make himself food for fishes before he would hurt a hair of a child's head. But, hush! here comes Miss Skinner. I wish I could say as much for her," muttered Vane, as Miss Pinky entered in state, bearing the tureen of soup in her hands, and followed by her two attendants, with other covered dishes.

Halcyone came down to join the circle at the table; but she was not our Halcyone at all. She was some other young woman, evidently subject to a chronic depression of spirits, and now suffering from an acute attack of pain in her temper.

Vandeleur, not knowing anything about the scene that had occurred at Hourie Hall, wondered as much as any one else at the change that had come over the bright bird at Stormy Point.

After dinner, Halcyone and Pinky Skinner both with-

drew, leaving the five gentlemen still seated around the table, over their wine and walnuts, pipes and cigars.

"You'll not leave us again until you are compelled to start on your journey, I hope, Mr. Vandeleur," said the host, puffing away at his pipe.

"I must ride over to the village, to see about securing my seat in the Washington coach that passes through there to-morrow evening, as I understand. But I shall return and spend the night here, of course," answered Vane.

"Ah, well—I'm glad of that. Now we shall have a sociable game of whist this evening, and I shall have a sane partner, and with your help, I'll have my revenge on Dick and Harry for the unhandsome way in which they took advantage of my partner's lunacy last night," chuckled the captain.

After one moderate glass of sherry, sipped slowly to keep company with the other men, who were drinking more and faster, Vane arose and excused himself to his host.

As the slippery state of the roads did not yet encourage equestrian exercise, the little one-horse sleigh was again put in requisition, and Mr. Vandeleur sped off toward the village of Henniker.

It was a mere little way-station of a seaport, situated at the mouth of Henniker Creek, but on the south point opposite to that of Henniker House, which was on the north point. It consisted of a steamboat landing, a country hotel, a couple of warehouses, a drygoods store, a grocery, an apothecary shop, a doctor's office, a wheelwright and blacksmith's shed, and about a dozen dwelling houses of various degrees, from the doctor's comfortable cottage, to the laborer's cabin. Nearly all, if not all, the real estate in the village belonged to Mrs. Jernyngham.

Vandeleur drew up his sleigh at the hotel, where the way stage office was kept, and got out and put down his name for the first vacant seat, supposing there should be one left when the stage should pass; for, as the agent informed him, they might all be taken in the town from which it started.

Having, however, done his best to secure it, and prom-

ised to be on the spot an hour before the stage would be expected, so as to be in full time, Vandeleur turned into the grocery store, which adjoined the hotel, and where the post office was kept. He went in, not with any expectation of getting letters, but upon mere speculation.

"Letters, sir? Name of Vandeleur, sir? Yes, sir; here's one came by this morning's mail. Glad you happened to call for it in such good time, sir. Your other letters, I think, if I remember right, remained here a week. We only get the mail in these parts once a week, sir," said the gossiping postmaster, in reply to Vane's inquiries; volunteering this information, while he tumbled over the piles of letters looking for the one that was wanted. At last he found it and handed it over to its right owner. It proved to be from Bishop Waldemar.

Withdrawing a short distance from the counter, to be out of the way of other customers, Vane opened the envelope and, to his surprise, read this:

ST. HELEN'S, NEW ORLEANS, December, 18—.

MY DEAR SON IN THE LORD:—Immediately after I wrote to you enclosing the testimonials you asked for, I received a notice from Brother Ignatius summoning me to your present neighborhood on business of importance. I write now only to say that if this should reach you before you leave for the South, you will please remain where you are and await my arrival. I shall be with you almost as soon as this letter. Commending you to the care of the saints, I remain, dear son, your poor father in the Lord,

JOHN WALDEMAR.

Much surprised, and still more pleased at the purport of the bishop's letter, since it relieved him of the painful duty of leaving the neighborhood where Berenice lived, Vane Vandeleur hastily folded and put it in his pocket, and hurried back to the hotel to countermand the half-secured seat in the Washington coach.

Then it occurred to him to inquire for letters for his old host; so he returned to the post office, and upon asking for them, received two letters and a newspaper. With these he re-entered his sleigh and sped on toward Stormy Point, which he reached in time for the captain's comfortable tea.

"I am like the domestic spongers, I always drop in about meal time," said Vane, as he smilingly sprang from his sleigh, threw the reins to Bobadilla, and ran up the

porch steps to meet Captain Storms, who had come out to meet him. Vane handed the old man his letters and newspaper.

"From Morrison and Morphy at last," exclaimed the old gentleman, as he received them, and led the way into the house, followed by Vandeleur.

Leaving his guest to be entertained by the other members of his family, the captain retired to a den that he called his office, chiefly because he never did any business in it, to read, and perhaps to answer his Baltimore correspondents' letter.

As Halcyone did not attempt to amuse Vane, Vane bethought himself that he would try to divert her, but alack! for his good intentions, his overtures were met with a request from her to be let alone. While he was yet wondering whether this brilliant creature could really be going melancholy mad, and if so, what could have caused the calamity, the captain returned to the room, with so cheerful a countenance, that Vane felt assured he had received good news.

Every one but Halcyone sat down to the tea-table in excellent spirits.

When it was over, Pike Turner took leave of the captain and his household, and rather astonished everybody by holding the hand of Miss Skinner in his own at parting, and saying:

"Well, Pinky, for the sake of the old times passed, and the old dreams faded, my last words to you on that head is, God bless you, Pinky, and make you happier than I could have done."

Miss Skinner received this benediction with the request that Mr. Turner wouldn't make a fool of himself.

Moved by a sort of inviting glance from the hunter's honest eyes, Vane followed him out into the porch.

"You wouldn't mind going a piece of the road with me, would you, Mr. Vandeleur?" inquired Pike.

"Certainly not," replied Vane.

And they walked together to where the wagon stood and climbed into it.

Pike drove slowly off. When they had got clear of the yard, the hunter turned to his companion, and said:

"Well, sir, I have settled with Pinky forever and ever, amen!"

"Have you? I am glad to hear it."

"Thank you, sir. I am glad to have it over."

"That was your business here to-day?"

"That was my business, sir. I thought, you see, of the old maxim, 'to be off with the old love before we be on with the new,' and so I came here to have a last understanding with Pinky, sir."

Vane thought that the honest hunter might have had that "last understanding" years ago, if he had been as willing to receive it then as now; but he refrained from saying so, and the hunter continued:

"So I took the opportunity to-day, sir, you being gone to the village, the other gentlemen sitting smoking around the fire, and little Halcyone, as I understood, sulking in her own room, and I went and found Pinky in the room next to the kitchen, where she spends her time when she is not in the kitchen. Well, sir, I made offers to her again. Sincere offers, sir; for, if she had accepted them, I should have taken her 'for better, for worse,' and tried to forget the short sunshine of dear Flavia's presence, and to have made my wife happy. But, sir, as soon as ever I had made my offers, she nearly snapped my head off."

"I am very glad to hear it. I would rather she had quite snapped your head off than married you, my good Pike, for I think the first-named fate would have been better for you than the last. But what in reality did the amiable virgin say?"

"She flashed round about me, as if she would have blasted me—she did, indeed, sir! And she said, as near as I can recollect:

" 'You intolerable, insupportable, incourageable brute! you are a moneymaniac on marrying me. You have asked me twenty times, and I have refused you as many. And you're getting worse as you grow older. You never used to ask me but once a year, and that was when you would come on in the spring. And this year you have come on both spring and winter, and asked me both times. And now you ask me again—which makes three times in one year. And if you ever mention such a thing

to me again as long as you live, I'll send for a constable and have you taken up, and made to give bonds to keep the peace toward me.'

"That was a very decisive answer, you know, sir. There was no such thing as misunderstanding that."

"I should think it was decisive—and clear," said Vane.

"'I'll never mention the subject to you again as long as I live, Pinky. I won't, indeed,' I said.

"'I'm not agoing to be tormented out of my life by you, and that I tell you!' she kept on saying.

"'Indeed I'll never torment you any more, Pinky,' I pleaded.

"'And it has been all along of you, hanging after me all this time, that has kept off your betters,' she said, very angrily.

"'I'll not hang after you any longer, Pinky,' I answered. And then, sir, I thought of what you had said about her liking somebody else. And, sir, I felt conscience stricken, though I knew I had meant well. But now, indeed, sir, do you think I had any hand in spoiling her prospects in that direction?" inquired the hunter, uneasily. "Because," he added, "her words have troubled me so much that that was one reason why I wanted you to come a piece of the way with me, so I might ask you."

"Not in the least, my good friend. Your devotion has been an honor to Miss Skinner, and has raised her in the estimation of all men. As to her 'prospects in that direction,' they were and are more visionary than any castle in the air I ever heard of. When a man marries his housekeeper it is usually when he is in danger of being left alone in his old age, and he doesn't often do it then."

"I am glad to hear you say so. I am quite relieved to find that I haven't hurt her fortunes after all. Well, sir, my talk with Pinky ended there, with the exception of the few last words I spoke to her at parting."

"And now you are a free man in your own estimation, as you always have been in reality. And I congratulate you."

"Thank you, sir, heartily."

They had now reached the outer gate of the farm that opened upon the highway, and Vane shook hands with Pike, and again wished him joy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BISHOP WALDEMAR.

"'Tis not the play of high-toned sense,
Nor keenly-eyed intelligence,
Which have the power we know so well,
To charm us;—but a deeper spell,
A something in his holy life,
Which unapproachable by strife,
Sheds its own hallow round."—WILLIAMS.

After leaving the wagon Vane Vandeleur walked rapidly across the footpath through the hard-frozen field, and so reached the farmhouse by a shorter route than the old road.

"Come," exclaimed the hearty host, "I was afraid you had given me the slip, and gone off at a tangent; but here you are at length, and now we'll have out the cards, and you and I will beat the very wits out of Dick and Harry. Come, shall we?"

"With great pleasure," smiled Vandeleur.

"And we'll have an extra oyster supper by-and-by. It is your last evening here, and, bless you, it shall be your merriest."

"Oh, but it is not my last evening, thank fortune! I may spend many, very many, merry evenings with you yet," said Vane, pleasantly.

"What do you say? Oh, yes, I know. When you come back—if you ever come back. I have heard all that before, and it is not particularly consoling," grumbled the old sailor.

"But, my kind friend, I'm not going away just yet," smiled Vane.

"Eh!" exclaimed the captain, opening his eyes.

"No, I shall stay to play whist with you, or to plague you a little longer—till you turn me out perhaps."

"Of course, you think I am very likely to do that."

"Well, at any rate, I may stay until the river opens, and the *Carrier* is righted and repaired, and then re-

embark and resume my voyage as if nothing had happened."

"And you feel sure that you will be very heartily welcome, sir. Now don't think me rude or inquisitive, but I can't understand this. A few hours since you were all for going, chains wouldn't have held you here."

"Because I was called away—that is, ordered away. But orders may be countermanded, you know. Read that letter, if you please," said Vane, putting the bishop's epistle in the captain's hands.

The old sailor read it with gradually dilating eyes, and then returned it, saying:

"Father John is a man of mysteries. What can bring him here? What business can possibly arise in this out-of-the-way place of sufficient importance to bring the Right Rev. Bishop John Waldemar here! Can you surmise?" inquired the captain, turning full upon his guest.

"Not in the least."

"Well, it is of no use to bother our brains about it. I am glad of any circumstance that has delayed your departure."

Vandeleur bowed his thanks.

"And now let's have the card table out. And where the deuce have Dick and Harry gone to? I do believe they have made off in the anticipation of the thrashing they're going to get. Hal!" exclaimed the captain, startling his ward, who was sitting quietly in a corner of the room, with a book in her hand, reading, or more like pretending to read, since the volume was only an interesting work on the art and mystery of "Tanning and Currying."

"Hal!"

"Yes, Guardy."

"Go hunt up your friends, Dick and Harry, and tell them to come in here, and be whipped."

Halcyone left her seat, and went wearily out of the room upon her errand.

"Now, can any soul alive tell what ails that girl?" groaned the captain, as he looked after her.

"Perhaps she suffers for the society of other young people," suggested Vane.

"That's it!" cried the captain, slapping his knee. "That's it! and I wonder why I never thought of it.

'No bird whose feathers gaily flaunt,
Delights in cage to bide:
Norham is grim and grated close,
Hemmed in by battlement and fosse,
And many a darksome tower;
And better loves my lady bright
To dwell in liberty and light,
In fair Queen Margaret's bower.'

Or, if not exactly so, why Stormy Point is a dreary, old place, especially in the winter time, and without young women. And Hal is lonesome and moping. So I shall send her 'to dwell in liberty and light' in old Mr. Basil Wall's farmhouse."

Before the captain had quite finished his speech, the subject of it entered the room, accompanied by Messrs. Dick and Harry.

"Come, gentlemen. Face the music. You won't have a dreaming girl to encounter this time, I tell you. Well, it's a good thing we never play for money, else you'd be bankrupt to-night, my friends," said the old man.

And this vaunt was not in vain. They sat down to the social game, that was "not played for money," or any other stake than victory, and before they left the table, which they did at eleven o'clock, the old captain and his partner had beaten their adversaries in three rubbers straight on, and had "whitewashed" them in the last.

Then they had the promised oyster supper, over the preparation of which Miss Pinky Skinner had condescendingly presided, under the impression that this was to be Mr. Vandeleur's last evening at Stormy Point—an impression which Messrs. Dick and Harry still shared, as at supper Dick solemnly proposed the health of their guest, wishing him a pleasant journey home.

The captain winked at Vane to be silent, until the complimentary speeches were made and the toast was duly drank. Then, before Vane could rise to reply, the captain dispelled their delusion by dryly telling them that their guest was not going away at all, or, at least, not for a long time; and much he enjoyed their embarrassment thereat. But Vane got up and thanked them, all the

same, and the joke was taken in good part, and everybody laughed and shook hands, and the evening ended as it had begun, joyously.

Early the next morning the little one-horse sleigh was again called into active service, and Vane Vandeleur left Stormy Point for a day's absence, to report himself and his changed plans to his liege-lady at Henniker House.

If my readers remember rightly, they know that the turnpike running along the south bank of the creek, just before it reaches the safe crossing place, passes by the "Old Church Road," and in sight of the chapel and House of St. Rosalie.

Now, when Vane reached this spot and saw the winding and ascending road and the wooded hill with the little white chapel and house rising above their clustering evergreens, he thought that he would run up there to call on the good priests, whose heartily-offered hospitality he had hitherto neglected. So he turned his horse's head and flew up the Old Church Road as fast as his fleet steed could run the sleigh over the smooth, frozen snow.

He turned into the home road, leading through the well-kept grounds, that looked pleasingly even now in the dead of winter, with their neatly-trimmed evergreen hedges, walks and groves. He drew up in front of the long, low, white building, known as the priests' home, alighted from the sleigh and knocked. Almost before his hand had left the knocker, the door was opened by a lay brother, who civilly invited him to come in, showed him through a plainly-furnished hall to an equally plainly-furnished parlor, pressed him to be seated, and then went to carry in the visitor's card to the fathers.

Meanwhile Vane sat down upon a hard-bottomed, stiff-backed wooden chair, apparently designed for the mortification of the flesh, and gazed around him upon a variety of depressing pictures—rare, old, black line engravings of saints and martyrs, each and every one of them in one extreme or the other of ecstacy, or agony. While still employing himself in this manner, the door opened, and the jolly form of good Father Bonhomme appeared.

"How do you do? How do you do? So you have at length deigned to remember our invitation. Well, better

late than never," he said, approaching the visitor with extended hands.

Vane, who had risen and bowed very low, in honor of the holy cloth, assured the father that, had he consulted his respectful feelings toward him and his brother priests, he should have called upon them long before.

"Well, and now there is only myself here to welcome you! Father Ignatius is closeted with ——. By the way, he must be a very intimate friend of yours, since he inquired so particularly after you——"

"Of whom do you speak?" inquired Vane, with a foreknowledge of the truth.

"The Right Reverend Father in God, Bishop Waldemar."

"Has he arrived?"

"Yes; took us quite by surprise this morning; reached Leonard Town last night, and instead of waiting for tomorrow evening's stage, hired a carriage and came on here, traveling all night. Almost the first question he asked was whether you had left the neighborhood. We told him no, but that we had heard you were going soon. He observed that he was glad to be told you were still here, as he had written to you to wait his arrival. He is now with Father Ignatius, as I said."

"Father Francis, I hope is well?"

"No, far from it. He is very ill. Any other man would keep his bed; but he, with all his pain and weakness, has gone on a round of sick calls, to help and comfort persons, many of whom, as far as bodily strength goes, are much more able to minister to him."

"I am sorry to hear of his ill-health. What form does it take, may I ask?"

"You may ask, indeed; but I cannot answer, because I do not know. When people are wasting away, without any apparent disease, and the doctors do not know the cause, they call it 'decline' or 'consumption,' and they are so far right, as it is a 'decline' of health and strength and a 'consumption' of flesh and blood. But in those cases, as in this, no one can tell the reason thereof," sighed Father Bonhomme. Vane hesitated whether to rise and take leave of Father Bonhomme, leaving his respects for the other priests, or to sit and stay until the

interview between Bishop Waldemar and Father Ignatius should come to a close, and give him an opportunity of meeting them. But his great desire to see Berenice prevailed over every other feeling and decided his course, and he got up to go.

"But had I not better let the bishop know that you are here?" inquired Father Bonhomme, holding his visitor's hand.

"No, I think not; I will come again. I am going on to Henniker, and shall pass here on my return, when I will drop in again. By that time this private interview will be over. I certainly should not like to have it interrupted for my sake now," said Vane.

"Well, under the circumstances, I agree with you. I shall tell the bishop when he comes down. Perhaps you will return and dine with us? We should all be very happy. Our dinner hour is early—two o'clock."

"Many thanks; but I shall dine at Henniker," said Vane, shaking hands with the jolly priest.

Once more in the sleigh, he slid over the ground and down the steep Old Church Road, with a swiftness that threatened to shoot the little vehicle over the horse's head. At the foot of the hill he turned into the highway again, sped up the course of the creek, crossed on the ice at the usual place, and then turned down the opposite shore, and so flew on to Henniker. He drew up at the foot of the terrace, threw his reins to one of a group of idle negro boys who were snowballing each other on the lawn, and then ran up the steps to the front door, which was opened by Euripides, before the visitor had time to knock.

"Are the ladies at home, You-Rip?"

"'Ladies at home?' No, sir. Leastways, none of 'em is at home 'cept 'tis Miss Berry, sir; she's in the parlor, sir; but the other ladies is all gone to de village, a shoppin'. I'se werry sorry, sir, 'deed, I is; and so will de ladies be, sir."

Of course, Vane must have been very sorry, too, though he didn't look like it.

"But come in, sir; Miss Berry's in the parlor, sir; and she'll be right glad to see you, I know, and she'll do the best she can to 'muse you till de oder ladies come back,

which, 'deed, I' 'fraid dey won't do till dinner time, 'deed is I."

Of course, Vane was very much afraid, also. But he followed You-Rip, who led the way to the parlor door, opened it suddenly, announced the visitor, and then backed out.

With an irrepressible cry of joy, Berenice started up to meet her lover.

"I thought you were gone. Oh, I am so glad, so glad to see you once more before you go!" she exclaimed, as she gave him both her hands.

He drew her to his heart, and kissed her in silence.

"It is only for a moment, dearest," he said. "And then I must find the bishop."

"Your old friend? Where is he?"

"At St. Rosalie."

"Then you will not have to go away—but it is better that you should go, Vane, is it not? That story, you know—that horrible story, Vane. It is never out of my mind an instant."

She wept on his shoulder, and even the strong man shuddered.

"Vane, I almost feel something will happen to you before I see you again."

"Don't fear, my beloved Berenice, I shall hasten back to claim you as my own fair wife."

She looked up with a glad light in her eyes, then she suddenly started back from his embrace.

"Never," she cried. "I love you too well, Vane. I will never marry you."

"Not even if I wish it?" he asked.

"Not even if you wish it," she said, dully.

"Then, this is good-by?"

"Yes. Go."

For a moment he clasped her in his arms, kissed her lips and brow; then he hurried away, with never a backward glance at the woman who was more to him than life, but between whom and himself stood the awful malediction.

And to Berenice, watching the man she loved pass out of her life, and to Vane, at war with the fates and con-

scious only of his dismissal, came ringing across the snow-clad hills the words of the prophet:

"When the dawn shall be midnight,
And the eve shall be morn—
When the child shall be christened
Before it is born—

"When the maid shall be widowed
Before she is wed—
The sin shall be pardoned,
The curse shall be dead."

THE END.

Whether the conditions of the oracle were ever fulfilled, the malediction lifted from the family, or the lovers united in marriage, shall be told in the sequel to this story, to be published immediately, under the title of "THE MAIDEN WIDOW," a copy of which will be sent postpaid upon receipt of 25 cents for paper binding or 75 cents for the cloth edition.

Mrs. L. T. Meade Series

AN EXCELLENT edition of the works of this very popular author of books for girls. Printed from large type on an extra quality of paper, cover design stamped in three colors, large side title letterings, each book in glazed paper printed wrapper.

Bad Little Hannah
A Bunch of Cherries
Children's Pilgrimage
Daddy's Girl
Deb and the Duchess
Frances Kane's Fortune
A Girl of the People
Good Luck
A Girl in Ten Thousand
The Honorable Miss
Girls of St. Wodes
Light of the Morning
Little Mother to the Others
The Medicine Lady
Merry Girls of England
Palace Beautiful
A Modern Tomboy
Polly—A New Fashioned Girl
Out of Fashion
School Favorite
Sweet Girl Graduate
Time of Roses
A Very Naughty Girl
Wild Kitty
World of Girls
Young Mutineer

ANY OF ABOVE TITLES SENT POST-PAID UPON RECEIPT OF FIFTY CENTS

M. A. Donohue & Co.
407-429 Dearborn Street CHICAGO

M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY'S

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

A Girl in Ten Thousand, by Mrs. L. T. Meade. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Girls of St. Wodes, by Mrs. L. T. Meade. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Gold Elsie, by E. Marlitt. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Grandmother Dear, by Mrs. Molesworth. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

The House That Grew, by Mrs. Molesworth. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Leona, by Mrs. Molesworth. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

The Late Miss Hollingford, by Rosa Mulholland. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Little Lame Prince, by Miss Mulock. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Little Mother to the Others, by Mrs. L. T. Meade. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Little Susie Stories, by Mrs. Prentiss. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

A Man Without a Country, by Edward Everett Hale. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Merle's Crusade, by Rosa N. Carey. 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

Miss Toosey's Mission and Laddie, 12mo, cloth. Illustrated. Price 50 cents.

For sale by all Booksellers or sent postpaid on receipt of price by the Publishers.

M. A. DONOHUE & CO.

415 Dearborn St. - CHICAGO

Oliver Optic Series

OWING to increasing demand for works of this author we are pleased to offer an edition at a popular price giving complete works in the sets listed. Books are attractively bound in art shades of English vellum cloth, three designs stamped in three colors. Printed from large type on an extra quality of clean flexible paper. Each book in glazed paper wrapper. 12mo cloth.

LIST PRICE, FIFTY CENTS

1 All Aboard; or, Life on the Lake.
2 Brave Old Salt; or, Life on the Quarter Deck.
3 Boat Club, The; or, The Bunkers of Rippleton.
4 Fighting Joe; or, The Fortunes of a Staff Officer.
5 Haste and Waste; or, The Young Pilot of Lake Champlain.
6 Hope and Have; or, Fanny Grant Among the Indians.
7 In School and Out; or, The Conquest of Richard Grant.
8 Little by Little; or, The Cruise of the Flyaway.
9 Now or Never; or, The Adventures of Bobby Bright.
10 Outward Bound; or, Young American Afloat.
11 Poor and Proud; or, The Fortunes of Kate Redburn.
12 Rich and Humble; or, The Mission of Bertha Grant.
13 Sailor Boy, The; or, Jack Somers in the Navy.
14 Soldier Boy, The; or, Tom Somers in the Army.
15 Three Millions; or, The Way of the World.
16 Try Again; or, The Trials and Triumphs of Harry West.
17 Watch and Wait; or, The Young Fugitives.
18 Work and Win; or, Noddy Newman on a Cruise.
19 The Yankee Middy; or, The Adventures of a Naval Officer.
20 The Young Lieutenant; or, Adventures of an Army Officer.

Any of the above titles will be sent prepaid upon receipt of 35c, or three copies for $1.00

M. A. DONOHUE & CO.

407-429 Dearborn St. CHICAGO

Bound To Win Series for Boys

100 TITLES

This new series is proving the most popular line of books for boys published this year. Look at the names of the authors of all the books and you will see the reason.

Alger, Cooper, Ellis, Henty, Kingston, Optic, Reid.

1 Adrift in New York.....Alger
2 Adventures Among the Indians. .....Kingston
3 Adventures in Cuba....Oswald
4 Adventures of Famous Sailors..
5 Adventures in the Tropics..... .....Gerstacker
6 Adventures in Forest and on Shore.....Ilsley
7 Afloat in the Forest....M. Reid
8 All Aboard.....Oliver Optic
9 Andy Gordon.....H. Alger, Jr.
10 Andy Grant's Pluck.. "
11 Boat Club.....O. Optic
12 Bonnie Prince Charlie....Henty
13 Bound to Rise.....H. Alger, Jr.
14 Boy Hunters.....Capt. M. Reid
15 Boy Knight.....G. A. Henty
16 Brave and Bold....H. Alger, Jr.
17 Bravest of the Brave....Henty
18 By England's Aid..G. A. Henty
19 By Pike and Dyke.. "
20 By Sheer Pluck.... "
21 The Cash Boy.....H. Alger, Jr.
22 Captain Bayley's Heir....Henty
23 Cast Up by the Sea.....Baker
24 Chester Rand.....H. Alger, Jr.
25 Cornet of Horse....G. A. Henty
26 Daniel Boone.....G. C. Hill
27 Deerslayer..J. Fenimore Cooper
28 Desert Home....Capt. M. Reid
29 Do and Dare..Horatio Alger Jr.
30 Driven From Home. "
31 Erie Train Boy.... "
32 Facing the World... "
33 For Name and Fame.....Henty
34 Forest and Frontier, or Adventures Among the Indians.....
35 Friends Though Divided.Henty
36 Green Mountain Boys.Thompson
37 Golden Canon....G. A. Henty
38 Hector's Inheritance...H. Alger
39 Helping Himself..... "
40 Herbert Carter's Legacy "
41 Hero of Pine Ridge...Butler..
42 In a New World....H. Alger Jr.
43 In Freedom's Cause.G.A. Henty
44 In the Reign of Terror... "
45 In Times of Peril...G. A. Henty
46 Jack Harkaway's School Days.. .....Hemyng
47 Jack's Ward.....H. Alger, Jr
48 Jed, the Poorhouse Boy.. "
49 Julius, the Street Boy.. "
50 Last of the Mohicans....Cooper
51 Life of Kit Carson....E. S. Ellis
52 Lion of St. Mark....G.A. Henty
53 Little by Little.....O. Optic
54 Lone Ranch.....Capt. M. Reid
55 Lion of the North..G. A. Henty
56 Luke Walton.....H. Alger, Jr.
57 Making His Way..... "
58 Mysterious Island...Jules Verne
59 Now or Never.....O. Optic
60 One of the 28th....G. A .Henty
61 Only an Irish Boy..H. Alger, Jr.
62 Out On the Pampas....G.Henty
63 Pathfinder..J. Fenimore Cooper
64 Paul the Peddler...H.Alger, Jr.
65 Phil, the Fiddler..... "
66 Pioneers, The..... .....J. Fenimore Cooper
67 Poor and Proud.....O. Optic
68 Prairie, The....J. F. Cooper
69 Ralph Raymond's Heir...Alger
70 Rifle Rangers....Capt. M. Reid
71 Risen From the Ranks...Alger
72 Robinson Crusoe....D. DeFoe
73 Sam's Chance.....H. Alger, Jr.
74 Scalp Hunters....Capt. M. Reid
75 Shifting for Himself.....Alger
76 Slow and Sure..... "
77 Spy, The....J. Fenimore Cooper
78 Star of India.....E. S. Ellis
79 Store Boy, The....H. Alger, Jr.
80 Strive and Succeed..... "
81 Strong and Steady..... "
82 Sturdy and Strong..G. A. Henty
83 Through the Fray..... "
84 Tom, the Boot-Black.....Alger
85 Tom Brown's School Days .....Hughes
86 Tom Brown at Oxford... "
87 Tour of the World in Eighty Days.....Verne
88 Try Again.....O. Optic
89 Try and Trust.....H. Alger, Jr.
90 Treasure Island.....Stevenson
91 Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea....Jules Verne
92 Uncle Tom's Cabin.....Stowe
93 With Clive in India.....Henty
94 Wood Rangers, or Trappers of Sonora.....
95 Young Acrobat....H. Alger, Jr.
96 Young Carthaginians....Henty
97 Young Colonists..... "
98 Young Outlaw.....H. Alger, Jr.
99 Young Midshipman.....Henty
100 Young Salesman.....Alger

For sale by all Book and Newsdealers, or will be sent to any address in the U. S., Canada or Mexico, post paid upon receipt of price, 70c each, in currency, money order or stamps.

M. A. Donohue & Co. 407-429 Dearborn St. CHICAGO

A G T

FAMILY DOOM

SOUTHWORTH